

# Rolling Out Gen AI In The Workplace



Gen AI is here. This may feel very abstract and irrelevant to many of our employees but may be a significant source of stress and worry for others.

This is more than another department change that employees need to evolve with. In the same way that computers have transformed how we all do our jobs in less than a generation, AI is quickly taking us to that next level of processing information using everything computers have already brought us.

For some of us, tech and new software are fun shiny new toys to tinker with. I know I'm in my happy place when I can poke around with a new system, platform or tech tool. But I also know it's important to consider strategies to support change, roll out new workflows with caution and appreciate everyone already has a full plate. Adding on the 'fun' of new tech is not everyone's cup of tea.

Start with baby steps but expose people to new software a few times before implementing. Use it in a pressure-free environment, like an icebreaker activity at a meeting, to play around with the tool in a non-urgent, zero-stakes situation. We already use legal research tools that use AI behind the scenes, but directly accessing and inputting data for good gen AI output is a skill we all need to develop and get comfortable with.

So what are some of the fears your employees may have about AI? What are the benefits to share with your team and what are some strategies to prepare our workforces for the massive AI-driven changes on the way?

## **Understanding the Fear of AI among Employees**

Employees will have a wide range of worries about AI in the workplace. Identifying those worries will help come up with a game plan to transition your workplace to the new era of work.

Here are key employee fears to address:

1. **Job Loss:** One of the most common fears around AI is that it will lead to significant job losses. As AI becomes more sophisticated, it can automate tasks that were previously done by humans, potentially leading to a decrease in the need for human labour.
2. **Privacy Concerns:** AI systems often require large amounts of data to function effectively. This can lead to concerns about how this data is being used and

protected.

3. **Lack of Control:** Some employees may feel uncomfortable with the idea of AI systems making decisions that were previously made by humans. This could lead to a fear of losing control over their work.
4. **Skill Obsolescence:** As AI systems become more capable, there is a fear that certain skills will become obsolete. This could lead to a need for retraining or even a complete career change, which many older employees would want to avoid.
5. **Ethical Concerns:** There are also concerns about the ethical implications of AI. For example, there may be concerns about bias in AI systems, or about the potential for AI to be used in ways that are harmful or unethical.
6. **Surveillance and Monitoring:** AI can be used to monitor employee performance and behaviour, leading to concerns about privacy and autonomy at work. Ontario has some legislation to partly address employee electronic monitoring, but few employees know this, and even fewer would find this an effective bridge with an employer they may not have trusted in the first place.
7. **Dependence on Technology:** There might be a fear that over-reliance on AI could lead to a loss of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This fear is often reinforced by generational differences in how much we should rely on tech for day-to-day problem-solving and information sources.
8. **Lack of Understanding:** Many people do not fully understand what AI is and how it works, leading to fear and mistrust. There will no doubt be a lot of myth-busting to do over the next couple of years as we all figure out this new paradigm of information sources.
9. **Inequality:** There is a concern that the benefits of AI will not be evenly distributed, leading to increased inequality. If human judgment is removed from decision-making, where do human effort, merit and integrity fit? Will the robots be making robot decisions? Does bad data reinforce bad decisions? Yes, but the answer is to constantly and ruthlessly challenge the input to ensure an accurate output, not throw out the tech advances altogether.

## **Examining the Potential Benefits of AI in the Workplace**

As with any change management in the workplace, a thoughtful strategy up front is necessary to facilitate such significant changes coming to workplaces over the next few years. The centrepiece of that strategy will be highlighting the benefits of AI to reassure employees they will not be replaced by robots. AI will augment and expand our work, not replace humans.

Here are the benefits to highlight as part of your change management strategy:

1. **Increased Productivity:** AI can automate routine tasks, allowing employees to focus on more complex and creative aspects of their jobs.
2. **Improved Decision Making:** AI can provide data-driven insights that help employees make more informed decisions.
3. **Enhanced Communication:** AI-powered chatbots can streamline internal communication, reducing delays and improving efficiency.
4. **Personalized Training:** AI can analyze an individual's performance and create personalized training programs to help them improve.
5. **Better Work-Life Balance:** By automating tasks, AI can reduce the amount of time employees need to spend at work, improving their work-life balance.
6. **Increased Job Satisfaction:** By removing mundane tasks from their workload, employees can focus on more satisfying aspects of their work.
7. **Improved Safety:** In industries like manufacturing, AI can monitor for safety hazards and reduce the risk of injury.
8. **Skill Enhancement:** Working with AI can help employees learn new skills and stay competitive in the job market.

9. Better Customer Service: AI can help employees respond to customer inquiries more quickly and accurately.
10. Cost Efficiency: By taking over routine tasks, AI can help businesses reduce labour costs, potentially leading to higher wages for employees.

## **Strategies for Combating Fear and Embracing AI in the Workforce**

So how do we roll out AI in our workplaces and foster a culture of innovation? Even if you do not yet have any AI-driven employee-facing changes to roll out today, we all need to prepare our workforce for what is just around the corner. Much of AI is still a behind-the-scenes application, but we need our employees to start learning how to access AI tools, how to integrate AI tools into our day-to-day jobs, and most importantly, how to embrace not resist change.

Here are strategic pillars to include in your gameplan:

1. Education and Training: One of the best ways to combat fear is through knowledge. By educating employees about AI and how it works, employers can help reduce fear and uncertainty. This can include training sessions, workshops, and seminars focused on AI.
2. Clear Communication: Employers should communicate clearly and often about the role of AI in the workforce. This includes explaining why AI is being used, how it will impact jobs, and what benefits it will bring.
3. Involvement in the Process: Employees should be involved in the process of implementing AI. This could mean having a say in how AI is used or being part of the team that designs and tests AI systems.
4. Focus on Upskilling: Rather than replacing humans, AI can be used to augment human skills. Employers should focus on upskilling their workforce, teaching them how to use AI tools and how to work alongside AI.
5. Showcase Success Stories: Sharing success stories of AI implementation can help to alleviate fear. This could be case studies from within the company or from other businesses.
6. Emphasize the Benefits: AI can bring many benefits to the workforce, including increased efficiency, reduced errors, and the ability to focus on more complex tasks. Emphasizing these benefits can help to combat fear.
7. Create a Supportive Environment: Employers should create a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable expressing their concerns and asking questions about AI.
8. Promote a Culture of Innovation: A culture of innovation encourages employees to embrace new technologies and ways of working, including AI.
9. Provide Reassurance: Employers should reassure employees that AI is not meant to replace them but to enhance their capabilities and make their jobs easier.
10. Demonstrate Transparency: Being transparent about the company's plans for AI can help to build trust and reduce fear.

## **Takeaways**

In the same way that calculators, word processors, spreadsheets, databases, servers and the internet have all transformed how we process and store information, AI will touch all aspects of most jobs. Understanding what worries our employees will help us all prepare effective strategies to guide our workplaces into this new era.

*The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.*

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