# Trust gap threatens inclusive AI adoption in UK workplaces



Artificial intelligence is reshaping how organisations work—but a growing trust gap between managers and employees could slow its potential. New research from HR platform HiBob shows managers are far more confident and optimistic about AI than their teams, raising concerns about how effectively businesses are managing the human side of digital transformation.

In a survey of 1,000 professionals, 59 percent of managers said they trust their company to provide AI training and support. Among individual contributors (ICs), that number drops to just 34 percent—a 25-point gap suggesting that AI adoption is as much about trust as it is about technology.

The divide is rooted in experience. Managers are often involved in AI strategy, vendor selection and change management, giving them a clearer view of AI’s purpose. They also tend to feel more secure in roles less vulnerable to automation. By contrast, frontline employees may experience AI as a top-down change, often accompanied by vague assurances and little guidance.

Broader industry data reinforces the picture. BambooHR reports 72 percent of executives use AI daily, versus only 18 percent of ICs. Qualtrics finds just half of employees believe their leaders can manage AI effectively or prioritise staff well-being through change.

HiBob outlines five key actions to rebuild trust and close the gap:

* **Include all voices:** Foster open AI discussions across the organisation—not just among executives and IT teams.
* **Educate clearly:** Explain how AI affects different roles and which skills remain relevant, reducing uncertainty.
* **Embed in development:** Integrate AI into coaching and performance reviews to frame it as an opportunity.
* **Offer real support:** Invest in training, dedicate time for learning and reward upskilling.
* **Track trust:** Use regular surveys to monitor sentiment and adjust accordingly.

There is appetite for AI among staff. Over half of managers and a third of ICs believe it could boost their productivity. But only 12 percent of employees have received formal training, highlighting a clear gap between ambition and delivery.

If ignored, the trust divide could entrench resistance, weaken morale and stall innovation. But companies that lead with empathy and inclusion stand to unlock AI’s full potential—empowering every employee to thrive.

The message is echoed across sectors. In accounting, for example, Karbon’s research shows growing executive excitement about AI, but lukewarm response from staff. The solution is consistent: communication, training and leadership engagement.

Ultimately, AI adoption is not just a technology story—it’s a workforce story. As Ken Matos, Director of Market Insights at HiBob, puts it: “The conversation about AI is a conversation about work itself—who it serves, who shapes it, and who thrives within it.”

For the UK to lead in responsible innovation, organisations must build AI strategies that put people first—grounded in trust, shaped by collaboration and designed for shared success.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.hrmonline.com.au/sponsored-content/bridging-the-ai-trust-gap-hi-bob/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.hcamag.com/us/specialization/hr-technology/hierarchical-gap-in-workplace-ai-adoption/541137> - A report by BambooHR highlights a significant disconnect in AI usage between leadership and individual contributors. While 72% of executives use AI daily, only 18% of individual contributors do the same. This disparity suggests that leaders are better positioned to recognize AI's value in optimizing operations and decision-making processes but may be failing to communicate that value to their employees.
3. <https://www.hcamag.com/asia/news/general/hierarchical-gap-in-workplace-ai-adoption/541165> - BambooHR's findings reveal a stark contrast in AI adoption rates between executives and individual contributors. The study indicates that 72% of VP or C-suite executives use AI daily, compared to just 18% of individual contributors. This 'staggering divide' points to a significant disconnect where managerial positions are better positioned to recognize AI's value but may not be effectively communicating it to their employees.
4. <https://www.hrotoday.com/news/ticker/employees-and-leaders-disagree-on-ai-benefits/> - Research from Qualtrics shows a low level of trust among workers in their bosses' ability to implement AI effectively. Only 53% of employees trust leaders to implement AI effectively, nearly 20 points lower than senior leaders. Additionally, only half of employees believe their boss will prioritize their well-being over profits when making decisions about new technologies, highlighting a significant trust gap between employees and leaders regarding AI implementation.
5. <https://www.bamboohr.com/about-bamboohr/press-release/ai-hierarchy-survey-report> - BambooHR's study reveals a growing gap in AI adoption between senior leadership and frontline staff. While 72% of C-suite/VP executives use AI daily, only 18% of individual contributors do the same. The report emphasizes the need for clear and comprehensive AI policies to address concerns and promote a culture of openness, enabling all employees to harness the full potential of AI.
6. <https://www.accountingtoday.com/news/ai-trust-gap-between-execs-staff-narrows-but-still-a-factor> - A report by Karbon indicates that while accountants' enthusiasm for AI has grown, a gap remains between firm leaders and staff. Among firm owners, leaders, and partners, 63% are excited about AI, up from 41% last year, while only 40% of individual contributors share this excitement. This suggests that management's views are still out of step with individual contributors and staff in technology, operations, and administrative positions.
7. <https://www.hcamag.com/asia/specialisation/leadership/trust-gap-between-employees-leaders-on-effective-ai-implementation/524671> - A report by Qualtrics reveals a major trust gap between employees and senior leadership regarding the effective implementation of AI. In Singapore, only 50% of interns to frontline managers trust their senior leaders to implement AI effectively, compared to 67% of senior directors to top-level leaders. This disconnect also exists in other areas surrounding AI, particularly on the impact of AI on the nature of work and whether organizations have principles, ethics, or guidelines on using AI tools.