Unlocking the Value of GenAI in Document Management

The Functional Business Leaders' View

Contents

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Executive summary

Generative AI has become a key area of focus for business leaders across the world seeking to unlock value from their technology by increasing employee productivity.

Adobe, a company with a rich history of facilitating communication and collaboration within organisations, commissioned London Research to carry out a business survey to better understand perceptions around the benefits and challenges associated with GenAI when deployed for document management and related areas within the workforce.

This report looks at GenAI uptake through the lens of 'functional business leaders', the heads of department most likely to be using the technology themselves and within their lines of business.

Three-quarters (77%) of this group said they themselves were 'very positive' about the impact of AI on their work life, even though their organisations are most likely to be approaching the technology carefully. Almost nine out of 10 respondents said their companies were either 'very' or 'somewhat' cautious about embracing AI.

Functional business leaders include VPs of financial information technology, directors of legal operations, directors of HR technology & payroll, directors of sales and sales ops, accessibility/diversity officers, CMOs, and VPs of brand. Unlike the 'digital business leaders' whose attitudes we discuss in the first report in this series, their first concern isn't upgrading the organisation's tech infrastructure or digitalising the business. Instead, it's doing their job quicker, and fulfilling their business function priorities more effectively and more efficiently. For many of these people, their first experience of GenAI will be in content creation and document management.

The research also found that:

- The majority of functional business leaders expect generative AI to increase productivity (55%) and reduce costs (48%). A significant minority also expect it to increase the amount of time employees spend on value-adding tasks (39%), improve their ability to scale production of content and assets (35%), and combat information overload by reducing time to knowledge (34%).

- Half (50%) of these respondents say they're excited about making greater use of AI in their role, and almost a third (30%) say they're happy. Less than a quarter (22%) describe themselves as anxious about it, and only 16% say they're fearful.

- Generative AI is already having a major impact on document management in over half our respondents' businesses, in use cases such as content creation, summarising documents and creating reports, and getting quick answers from unstructured data.

Methodology
This report is the second in a series of three reports looking at attitudes to the use of AI in content creation and management, each from a different group of senior executives within the organisation. The research is based on a survey of 450 C-level executives, senior managers and directors/heads of department, carried out in the first half of 2024. The respondents were spread evenly across the United Kingdom, France and Germany. This report examines the perspective of 'functional business leaders'. This group includes VPs of financial information technology, directors of legal operations, directors of HR technology & payroll, directors of sales & sales ops, accessibility/diversity officers, CMOs, and VPs of brand.

Section 1

Introduction

This report looks at how functional business leaders – including heads of different departments within an organisation – think their businesses need to change to respond to the challenging business landscape of the 2020s.
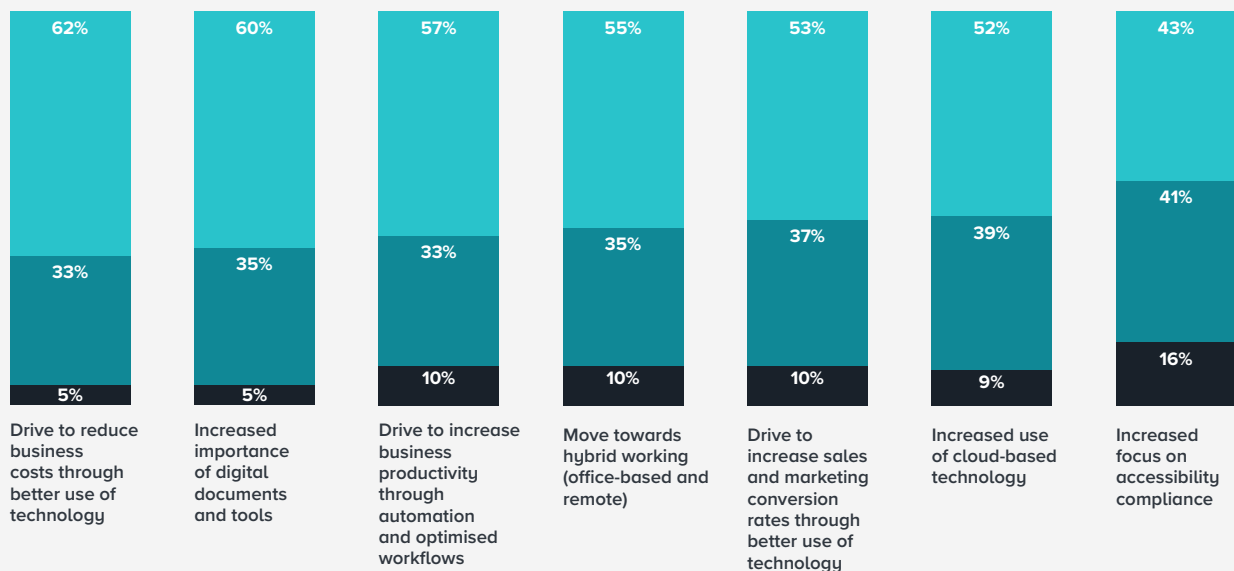
Their main priorities are typical of periods of uncertainty: improving productivity and cutting costs (*Figure 1*). And they're increasingly looking to technology – particularly AI – for the next leap forward in these areas.

According to the research (*Figure 2*), these people do not typically consider themselves to be among the key decision-makers when their organisation is looking to use AI to make the workforce more efficient. They're most likely to believe that role is filled by the CIO/CTO, CEO or CFO. However, they see themselves as having a key influence on these decisions in around half of the businesses surveyed.

FIGURE 1

How would you describe the impact of the following business trends on your organisation?

● Major impact
● Minor impact
● No impact

Drive to reduce business costs through better use of technology	Increased importance of digital documents and tools	Drive to increase business productivity through automation and optimised workflows	Move towards hybrid working (office-based and remote)	Drive to increase sales and marketing conversion rates through better use of technology	Increased use of cloud-based technology	Increased focus on accessibility compliance
62%	60%	57%	55%	53%	52%	43%
33%	35%	33%	35%	37%	39%	41%
5%	5%	10%	10%	10%	9%	16%

62%

Almost two-thirds of functional business leaders say the drive to reduce costs through better technology usage is having a major impact.

Qualitative research prior to the survey suggested the main business priorities of people in functional leader roles included:

- Improving efficiency and reducing costs to drive/support business profitability.
- Maintaining compliance, and meeting or exceeding industry standards.
- Ensuring AI is easy to implement alongside existing solutions.

The research confirmed the importance of these aims in 2024 (*Figure 3*). It also revealed how that importance has changed in the past 12 months (*Figure 4*).
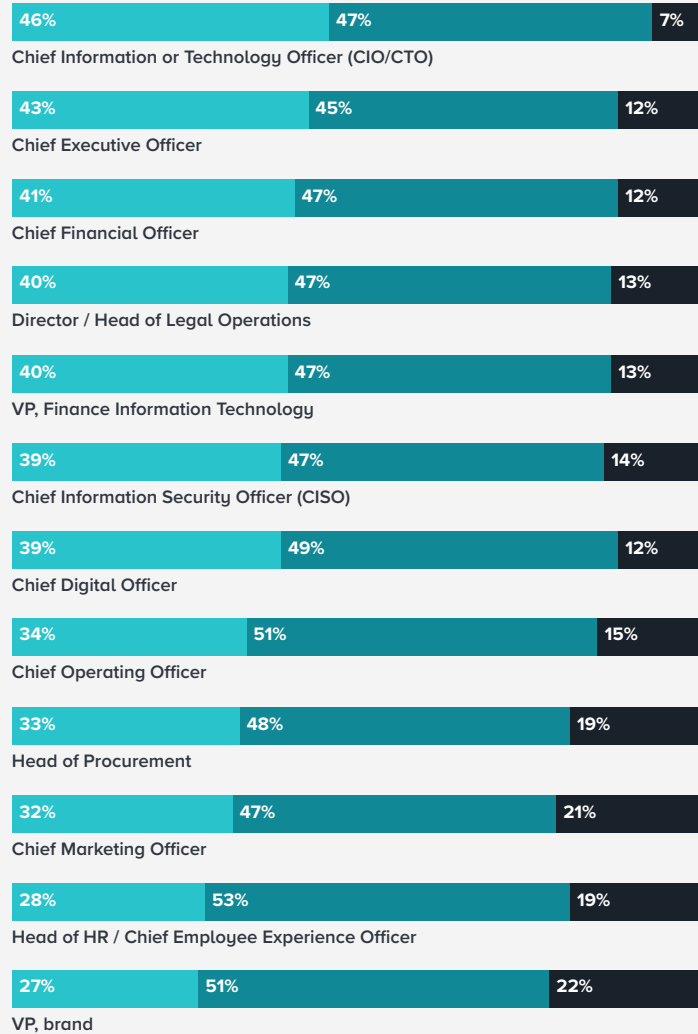
In 2024, the two top priorities for our respondents are security, and customer engagement and satisfaction (both chosen as a 'high priority' by 76%). Just over half (57%) said security was more important than it was a year ago but, strikingly, a similar proportion (56%) said the same about digital transformation. A slightly smaller percentage (52%) said customer engagement and satisfaction were more important than a year ago.

The focus on security is no surprise, nor is the fact that it's seen the greatest increase in emphasis. The cost of a data breach continues to increase. At the same time, new technologies create new vulnerabilities. Four out of five data breaches in 2023 involved data stored in the cloud, and well over a third of respondents (41%) felt concerns about the security of the cloud were a major barrier to AI adoption (see *Section 3*). And AI itself has become part of the cyber-security 'arms race'.

FIGURE 2

Who are the key decision-makers in your organisation when it comes to making decisions about use of AI technology for a more effective workforce?

- ● Decision maker
- ● Influencer
- ● Not involved

Role	Decision maker	Influencer	Not involved
Chief Information or Technology Officer (CIO/CTO)	46%	47%	7%
Chief Executive Officer	43%	45%	12%
Chief Financial Officer	41%	47%	12%
Director / Head of Legal Operations	40%	47%	13%
VP, Finance Information Technology	40%	47%	13%
Chief Information Security Officer (CISO)	39%	47%	14%
Chief Digital Officer	39%	49%	12%
Chief Operating Officer	34%	51%	15%
Head of Procurement	33%	48%	19%
Chief Marketing Officer	32%	47%	21%
Head of HR / Chief Employee Experience Officer	28%	53%	19%
VP, brand	27%	51%	22%

Those in functional business leader roles are more likely to be influencers than decision-makers when it comes to AI technology.

Digital transformation never ends

There are various explanations for the high – and increased – priority of digital transformation. It may be due to late adopters accelerating their digital journey. It could also be that leaders of functional business units are less developed in their thinking about digital transformation than are their CIO, CTO or Chief Digital Officer counterparts. But there's a growing body of opinion that there is no point at which an organisation can declare itself digitally transformed.

Instead, businesses must think in terms of constant development of their digital capabilities to be able to respond to continuing interlinked changes in technology, customer behaviour and market conditions. For example, any digital transformation under way now must include consideration of AI, which wouldn't have been the case even a few years ago.

Increased adoption of this thinking would certainly explain why digital transformation has moved up the agenda since last year. It's also worth noting that three of the other high priority areas (customer engagement and satisfaction, employee productivity, and reducing costs across the business) are all associated with digital transformation.

Better productivity and reduced costs

Figure 1 also gives us a more complete picture of the attitudes of our functional business leaders. The top three trends they see having a major impact on their organisations are all centred around making better use of technology to increase productivity and reduce costs. They are also all interlinked.

There is also a suggestion that respondents to this survey may not be concerned by the type of technology used, as long as it delivers on their aims. Just over half (52%) cite increased use of cloud-based technology as having a major impact on their business. This compares to between 57% and 62% who just want technology to deliver on their aims.

FIGURE 3

How much of a priority are the following areas for your organisation in 2024?

● Low priority   ● Medium priority   ● High priority

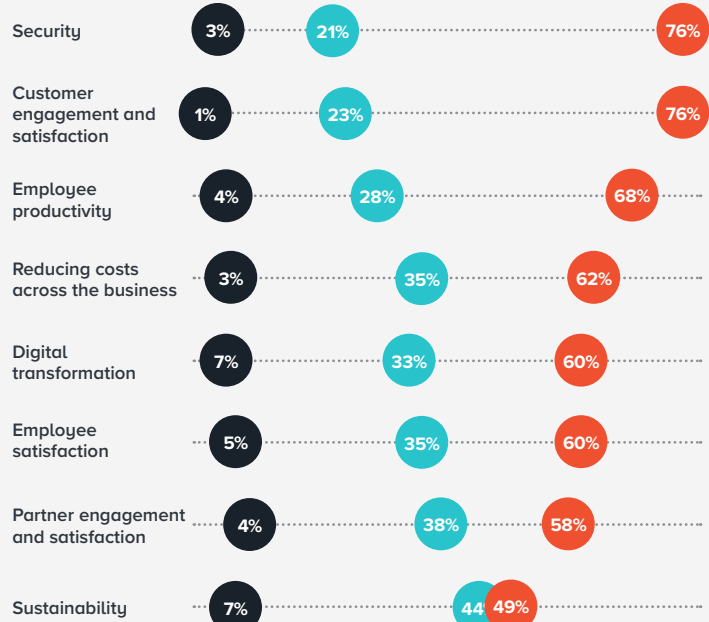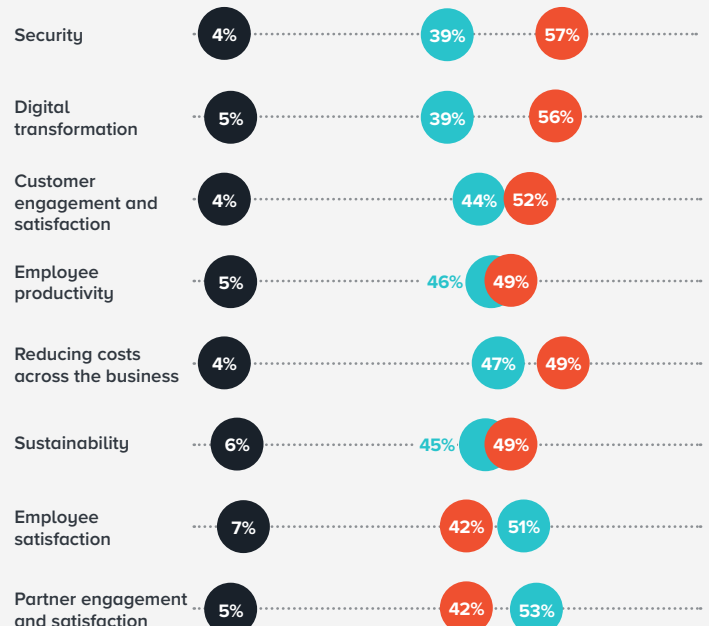|	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority
Security	3%	21%	76%
Customer engagement and satisfaction	1%	23%	76%
Employee productivity	4%	28%	68%
Reducing costs across the business	3%	35%	62%
Digital transformation	7%	33%	60%
Employee satisfaction	5%	35%	60%
Partner engagement and satisfaction	4%	38%	58%
Sustainability	7%	44%	49%

FIGURE 4

Are these objectives more or less important to your organisation than they were a year ago?

● Less important   ● The same   ● More important

	Less important	The same	More important
Security	4%	39%	57%
Digital transformation	5%	39%	56%
Customer engagement and satisfaction	4%	44%	52%
Employee productivity	5%	46%	49%
Reducing costs across the business	4%	47%	49%
Sustainability	6%	45%	49%
Employee satisfaction	7%	51%	42%
Partner engagement and satisfaction	5%	53%	42%

Section 2

Attitudes to AI

Alongside the more general trends discussed earlier, there are a number of challenges faced by today's knowledge workers:
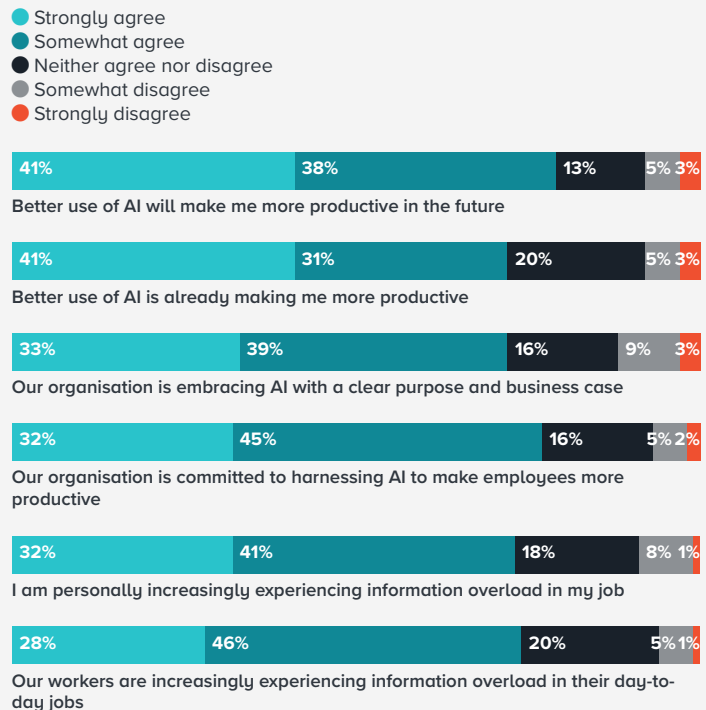
- They need help focusing on what matters and finding critical insights faster. Four out of five (80%) worldwide experience information overload.
- Collaboration is less effective and efficient than it needs to be. The average knowledge worker spends 8.2 hours each week looking for information and expertise, and recreating and resharing information.
- Protecting sensitive business data in PDF documents from cyber threats is increasingly important, particularly in regulated industries. Almost half (44%) of employees have accidentally leaked data via email.
- Inefficient and insecure document experiences and processes are slowing businesses down. *Document Creation* is usually an ad hoc, unstructured process; *Document Review & Revision* is the most complex part of the document lifecycle and may involve internal or external participants; *Document Approval* tools and e-signing have become more commonplace with more remote working.

The research carried out for this report backs up these concerns, and also shows that AI is increasingly seen as the solution (*Figure 5*). In terms of information overload, a third of our functional business leader respondents (32%) strongly agreed this was a problem for them, while slightly fewer (28%) said the same about their employees. On top of that, two out of five (41%) somewhat agreed they were experiencing information overload, and slightly more (46%) somewhat agreed their staff were.

However, two out of five (41%) also strongly agree that better use of AI is already making them more productive. The same percentage also strongly agree that it will make them more productive in the future. Beyond that, a third (33%) strongly agree that their organisation is embracing AI with a clear purpose and business case. A further 39% somewhat agree. And a third (32%) also strongly agree that part of that business case is making employees more productive. A further 45% somewhat agree.

FIGURE 5

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your own organisation?

- 🔵 Strongly agree
- 🟢 Somewhat agree
- ⚫ Neither agree nor disagree
- ⚪ Somewhat disagree
- 🔴 Strongly disagree

41%	38%	13%	5%	3%

Better use of AI will make me more productive in the future

41%	31%	20%	5%	3%

Better use of AI is already making me more productive

33%	39%	16%	9%	3%

Our organisation is embracing AI with a clear purpose and business case

32%	45%	16%	5%	2%

Our organisation is committed to harnessing AI to make employees more productive

32%	41%	18%	8%	1%

I am personally increasingly experiencing information overload in my job

28%	46%	20%	5%	1%

Our workers are increasingly experiencing information overload in their day-to-day jobs

73%

Almost three-quarters of respondents say they are experiencing information overload in their jobs.

Individual enthusiasm…

Further evidence our respondents' enthusiasm for AI can be seen in *Figure 6*. A third (32%) of them describe their feelings about the impact of AI on their work life as 'very positive', and another 45% said they're 'somewhat positive'.

This is not as high as the levels reported by digital vision leaders (i.e. Chief Information Officers, Chief Technology Officers and Chief Digital Officers) in the first report in this series. Around half (49%) reported being very positive and 41% said they were somewhat positive. But given that people working in digital technology usually display a strong affinity for 'the shiny new object', such enthusiasm among people working with – rather than in – tech is notable.

It is also further borne out by the emotions our respondents expressed around greater use of AI in their job roles (*Figure 7*).

Technology people score themselves higher for positive emotions than those heading up different lines of business, and the reverse is true for negative emotions, although the differences here are smaller. Technologists are notably happier with the prospect of greater AI use than functional business leaders (44% vs. 30%), and also more excited (61% vs. 50%). The two groups are roughly equally content with the prospect (47% vs. 43%).

50%
Half of functional business leaders expressed excitement about greater use of AI in their job role.

FIGURE 6

How would you describe your own feelings about the impact of AI on your work life?
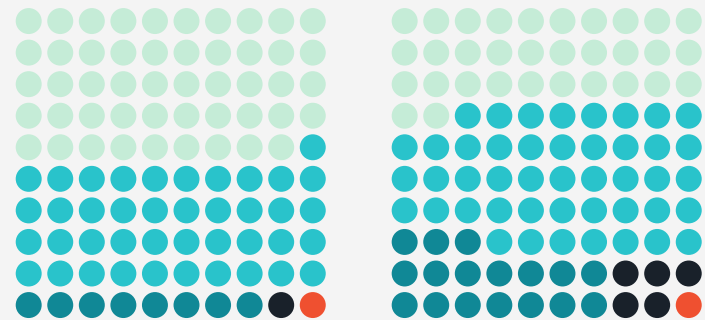
Digital vision leaders

● Very positive	49%
● Somewhat positive	41%
● Neutral	8%
● Somewhat negative	1%
● Very negative	1%

Functional business leaders

● Very positive	32%
● Somewhat positive	45%
● Neutral	17%
● Somewhat negative	5%
● Very negative	1%

FIGURE 7

Which emotions best describe your feelings about greater use of AI in your job role?

● Digital vision leaders
● Functional business leaders

Emotion	Functional business leaders	Digital vision leaders
Excitement	61%	50%
Contentment	47%	43%
Happiness	44%	30%
Anxiety	16%	22%
Fear	9%	16%
Confusion	9%	11%
Sadness	7%	6%
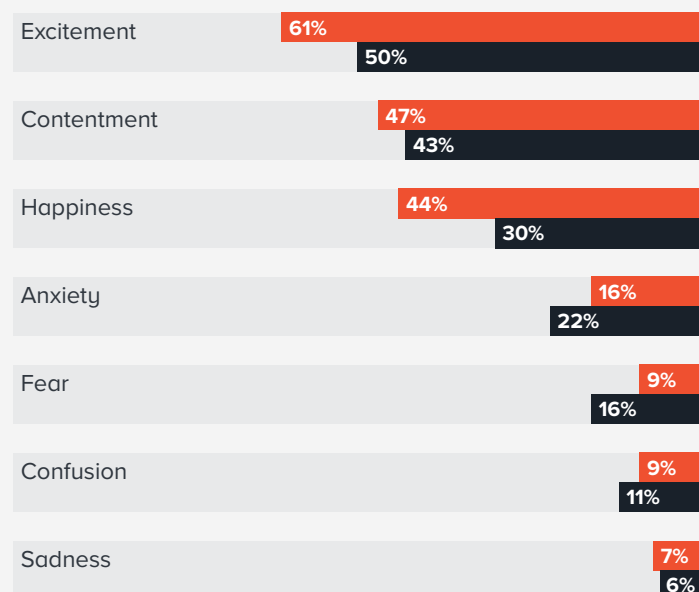
...Corporate caution

However, this enthusiasm doesn't translate to the corporate level (*Figure 8*). Almost two-thirds (61%) of respondents describe their organisation's approach to embracing AI for content-related activities as 'somewhat cautious'. A quarter (27%) go further, saying it's 'very cautious'.

And this caution is apparent in the levels of AI adoption reported (*Figure 9*).

Only 5% of functional business leaders say AI is 'business as usual' in their day-to-day activities. A further 29% describe AI as 'operationalised into their day-to-day activities'. But more than a third of (38%) say they're only experimenting with the technology, and more than a quarter (28%) haven't used AI capabilities at all.

There is also a contradiction in companies' use of AI. The technology is now widely embedded in commercial software, so many people are already using it without realising. And while the CTO or CIO might understand how pervasive it is, it's unlikely their C-suite colleagues are as aware.
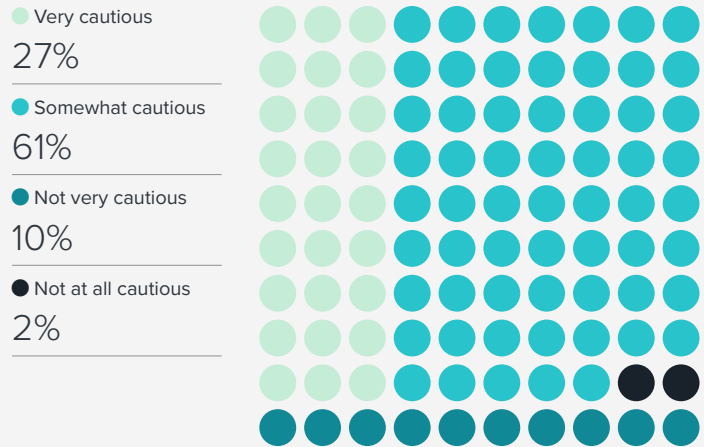
5%

The proportion of functional business leaders who say that AI is 'business as usual' in their day-to-day activities.

FIGURE 8

How would you describe your organisational culture in the context of embracing AI for content-related activities?

- Very cautious
  27%
- Somewhat cautious
  61%
- Not very cautious
  10%
- Not at all cautious
  2%

FIGURE 9

How would you describe your organisation's approach to the use of AI in the context of content-related activities?

28%
We are aware of the potential but have not used AI capabilities

5%
AI is very much business as usual in the context of our day-to-day activities

38%
We are experimenting but haven't developed many proofs of concept

29%
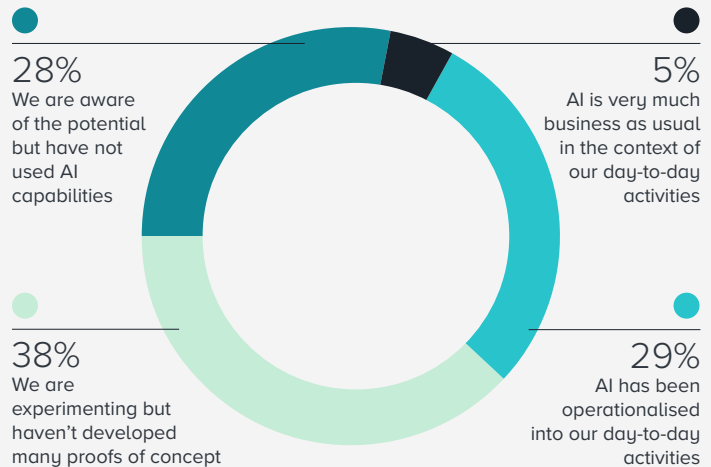AI has been operationalised into our day-to-day activities

Figure 10 shows the extent to which our respondents and their teams are already using AI in everyday content-related activities.

Clearly, AI is already having a major impact on all these activities within the majority of organisations surveyed, with most remaining companies planning to adopt AI for these use cases.

For example, in an R&D department, a senior scientist might spend more than 20 hours a week reading research reports and white papers, then writing evaluations that synthesise the information into actionable insights for the rest of their team. Similarly, a risk analyst in a compliance department can spend more than 15 hours a week monitoring policy-related forums and websites for details

of regulatory changes and producing proposed plans of action for the relevant departments. Generative AI, which can comprehend and summarise information could significantly cut the time involved in these activities, is already being used in more than half of our respondents' organisations.

This might seem to contradict the findings shown in *Figure 9*, that the majority of respondents (66%) say they're either not using AI, or are only experimenting with it. But, as noted earlier, tech suppliers have already introduced AI-based features into many of their products, so it's possible for an organisation to be using AI without the less tech-savvy employees even realising. For them, it's just the latest upgrade.

FIGURE 10

As part of your day-to-day work are you or colleagues in your team using AI for any of the following content-related activities?

- Yes
- No, but planning to use
- No, and no plans to use

	Content creation (text)	Summarising articles and documents	Generating documents and reports	Getting quick answers from documents (including link to source)	Proof-reading and editing documents	Content creation (images and video)
Yes	57%	57%	55%	52%	51%	51%
No, but planning to use	32%	34%	35%	36%	37%	34%
No, and no plans to use	11%	9%	10%	12%	12%	15%
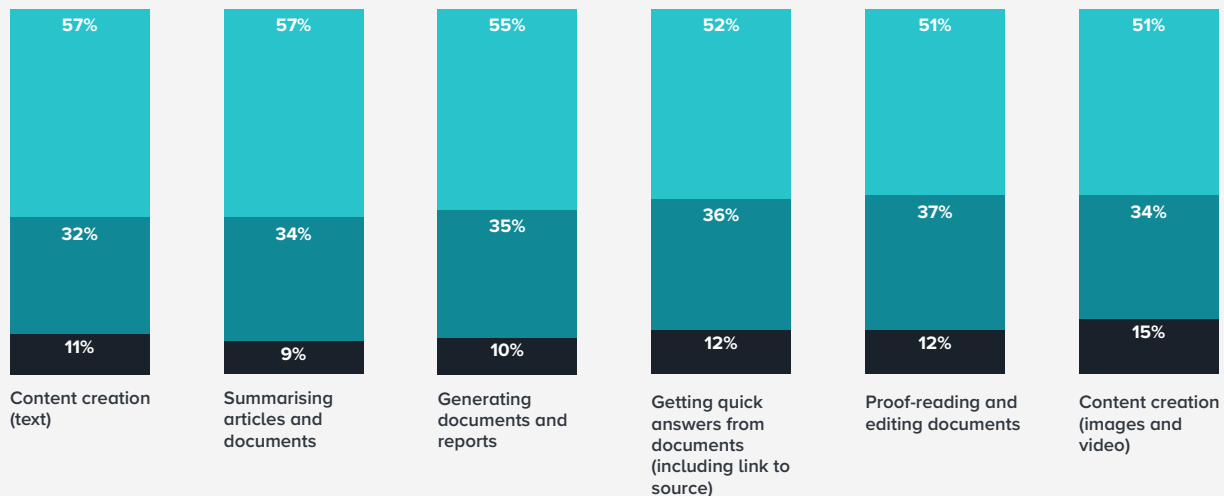
57%

The percentage of respondents reporting that they're already using AI for content creation and article or document summaries.

Section 3

Benefits and barriers

The previous section identified a dramatic difference in attitudes to AI between heads of functional business departments and the leadership of the organisations they work for. Almost nine out of 10 respondents said their organisational culture around the use of AI for content-related activities was either 'somewhat' or 'very' cautious. In comparison, almost eight out of 10 described their personal feelings about the impact of AI on their work life as 'somewhat' or 'very' positive.

So what's behind this difference in views?

Figure 11 and *Figure 12* show the efficiencies heads of departments expect to make through better use of AI.

Two-thirds of respondents (67%) think AI could save their average employee between two and eight hours a week (*Figure 11*). Almost a fifth (19%) think it could be more than that. Costing this out, consider a company with 30,000 employees. If even 1% (300 people) saved two hours work a week, that would be the equivalent of 15 full-time employees.

It's also interesting to note that, while a similar proportion of respondents feel they themselves could also save between two and eight hours a week with AI, almost half (48%) believe the saving would actually be smaller – between two and four hours. This is reflected in the finding below, that more than a third (39%) agree that using AI would allow employees to concentrate on tasks that add more value (*Figure 13*). In most cases, the amount of low-value-adding work a person does decreases as they rise up the organisation.

FIGURE 11

How many hours per week do you estimate the average employee in your department could save through better use of AI technology?

- Less than 1 hour a week
- 1 hour a week
- 2-4 hours a week
- 5-8 hours a week
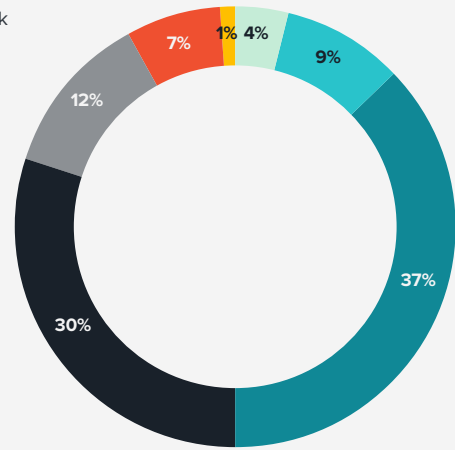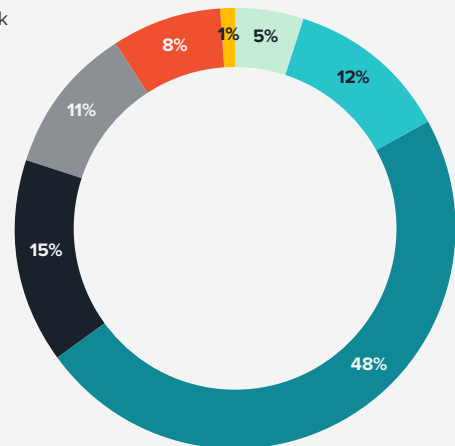- One day a week
- More than one day a week
- Other

FIGURE 12

How many hours per week do you estimate that you could personally save through better use of AI technology?

- Less than 1 hour a week
- 1 hour a week
- 2-4 hours a week
- 5-8 hours a week
- One day a week
- More than one day a week
- Other

Increased productivity is the main benefit

With this in mind, it's no surprise to see that respondents are most likely to regard increased productivity as a benefit of using AI for content-related tasks. Perhaps the only remarkable thing is that the percentage that do so isn't higher than 55%.

Almost as many (48%) see reduced costs as a benefit, while more than a third (39%) agree that using AI would allow employees to concentrate on tasks that add more value. There is also recognition of the role of AI in addressing the four pain points discussed at the start of *Section 3*. A third of respondents (34%) said AI would address the problems of information overload and ineffective collaboration by accelerating time to knowledge. A similar percentage (35%) said AI would help them scale the production of content and assets, reducing the problems of inefficient and insecure document experiences and processes that are slowing businesses down.

Security is the biggest concern

In the face of all these benefits, the most significant worry is security (*Figure 14*). Two respondents out of five (41%) rate fears around security of content and documents and fears around security of the cloud as major barriers to further adoption. A further 45% rate each as a minor barrier.

Other problems are only slightly less concerning. Fears around ethics and legalities relating to AI technology are a major barrier for 37% of respondents, and a minor one for 42%. And the group of what might be described as 'management issues' – lack of training, budget and understanding – are a major issue for just over a third. It's notable that lack of training is more likely to be seen as a minor barrier (51%) than either lack of budget (44%) or lack of awareness (41%).

However, all of these three are best approached as aspects of the same challenge. Lack of budget for AI doesn't just stop you buying the tech, it reduces the training available. Meanwhile, lack of understanding can mean it's harder to win budget in the first place, and may also lead to the assumption that a few hours of AI experimentation is all the training required.

FIGURE 13

What do you see as the benefits of utilising AI for content-related tasks?

- Increased productivity — 55%
- Reduced costs — 48%
- Ability to focus on more value-adding tasks — 39%
- Ability to scale production of content and assets — 35%
- Accelerate time to knowledge — 34%
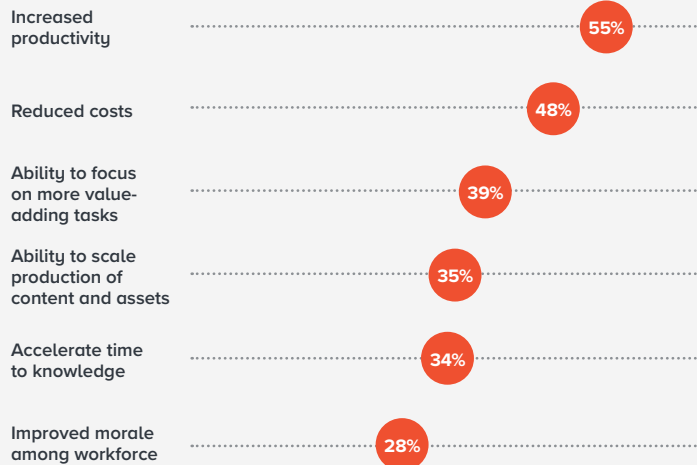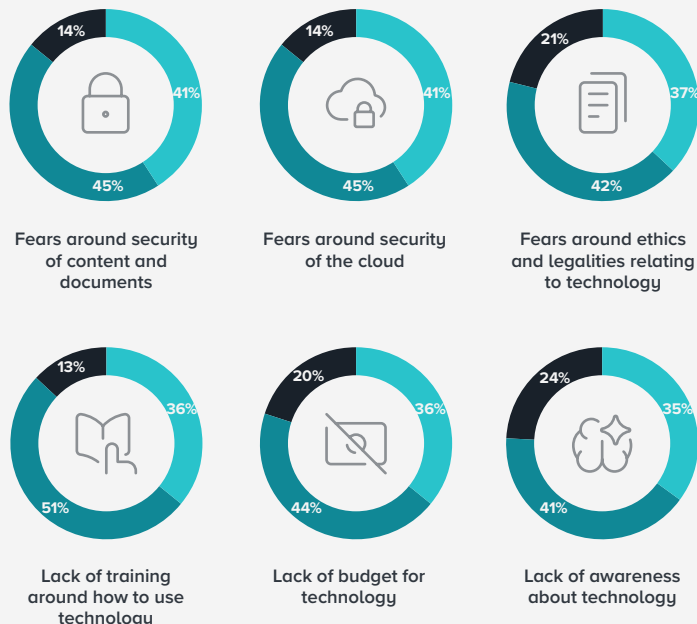- Improved morale among workforce — 28%

FIGURE 14

What are the barriers preventing greater uptake of AI-driven technology for content-related tasks and processes?

● Major barrier ● Minor barrier ● Not a barrier

- Fears around security of content and documents: 41% / 45% / 14%
- Fears around security of the cloud: 41% / 45% / 14%
- Fears around ethics and legalities relating to technology: 37% / 42% / 21%
- Lack of training around how to use technology: 36% / 51% / 13%
- Lack of budget for technology: 36% / 44% / 20%
- Lack of awareness about technology: 35% / 41% / 24%

Section 4

Conclusion

It's now beyond doubt that AI is going to have a profound impact on every aspect of our lives, professional and personal. It's also true that we're only beginning to discover what that impact might be. However, in the short term, one of the most important areas of application for GenAI is going to be content creation and document management.

Our research shows there is a split in business attitudes to the technology. Functional business leaders — the people whose teams and departments will increasingly benefit from GenAI — are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the effect it will have on their working lives. Three-quarters describe their feelings as either 'very' or 'somewhat' positive. They also believe that AI will provide solutions to their most pressing business problems around content and documents; reducing information overload, improving collaboration, and cutting time-to-knowledge and time-to-market. Ultimately, they see it as crucial to delivering the experiences customers are increasingly demanding.

But this view is not shared at a corporate level. Almost two-thirds (61%) of respondents say their organisation's approach to embracing AI for content-related activities is 'somewhat cautious'. A quarter (27%) go further, describing it as 'very cautious'. Around two-thirds of businesses (66%) taking part in our survey are either not using AI at all or are still only experimenting, according to functional business leaders.

The main reason for this caution is concern about security; of the content created by AI, and of the clouds that house the AIs themselves. It's also the fastest-growing concern, partly because it's inseparable from the rise of AI and cloud technologies. The more accessible these become, the more likely they are to be used against businesses by bad actors. The continuing security arms race has just stepped up a level.

The other barrier to adoption is the familiar trio of managerial issues; lack of understanding leading to lack of resource and training. Two out of five organisations in our survey have overcome these barriers. AI is now an established part of their day-to-day operations.

These are the businesses that are already seeing the benefits of the technology, and are best placed to keep doing so as they grow their understanding and skills in the area. Those that have yet to embrace AI face the unenviable choice between slipping further behind their more progressive peers, or having to pay a premium to catch up with them.

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