

FORUM INSIGHT

AI at Work

Adoption is accelerating. Organizational adaptation is the harder part.

The Canadian Forum on Workplace Innovation · July 2026

THE ARGUMENT

AI adoption is rising quickly, but the strongest evidence does not support a simple equation of adoption with productivity. The more defensible conclusion is that value depends on the work around the technology: task choice, data, workflow, skills, management, governance, human oversight and measurement.

19.2%¹

businesses using AI · Q2 2026

35.9%²

workers using generative AI at work ·
March 2026

44.4%¹

AI-using businesses changing training
or staffing

1 Adoption is accelerating – but the measures are different

In Q2 2026, 19.2% of businesses reported using AI to produce goods or deliver services during the previous 12 months, up from 12.2% in Q2 2025 and 6.1% in Q2 2024.¹ Separately, 35.9% of workers aged 15 to 69 reported using generative AI as part of their main job or business in March 2026.² These are not competing adoption rates: one measures business use of AI in production or service delivery, the other individual use of generative-AI tools.

The unevenness is also substantive. Business AI use was 42.3% in information and cultural industries and 40.4% in finance and insurance, but 9.2% in construction and 7.9% in wholesale trade.¹ The ILO's 2025 task-level analysis similarly cautions that AI exposure is better understood at the task and occupation level than through simple job-level predictions; globally, it concludes that transformation is more likely than full automation for most exposed occupations.

2 Access, adoption and realized value are different stages

Deloitte Canada's 2026 enterprise survey of 175 Canadian business and IT leaders provides useful complementary evidence, though it is not representative of all Canadian businesses.⁶ Its Canadian results emphasize a gap between access and realized value: 62% of surveyed organizations reported AI access for more than 40% of their workforce, while only about two-thirds were using AI to reinvent processes. The same research found 63% lacked confidence that current infrastructure could support future AI demands.

EVIDENCE RULE

Use official Statistics Canada measures for national prevalence. Use executive surveys such as Deloitte's to understand implementation experience — not to substitute for population-level adoption statistics.

3 Implementation creates work around the tool

Among Canadian businesses that had used AI, 44.4% reported changes to training or staffing practices because of that use. Nearly one-third trained existing employees and more than one-fifth trained executives. Among AI-using businesses with 100 or more employees, 68.1% trained employees and 51.7% trained executives.¹ OECD's 2026 work on AI and skills reaches a compatible conclusion across countries: training is associated with more positive worker-reported outcomes, while managerial, problem-solving and human skills remain important alongside technical capability.⁴ OECD also cautions that training needs to sit within a broader package that includes worker involvement, transparency, accountability and attention to privacy and bias.

4 Adoption is not the same as productivity improvement

A 2026 Statistics Canada firm-level study found AI-adopting firms had labour productivity 16.8% higher than non-adopters in a benchmark specification. After controlling for initial productivity, the estimate fell to 10.2%. After further controls for complementary capabilities — including R&D, cloud computing, data analytics, advanced robotics and ICT training — the association fell to 5.1% and was no longer statistically significant. The study also found no significant relationship between AI adoption and short-term productivity growth.³

This does not show that AI cannot raise productivity. It shows that firms that adopt AI differ from firms that do not, and that complementary organizational capabilities account for much of the observed productivity gap. The correct interpretation is association, not a causal return from adoption.

5 Governance belongs inside implementation

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada and provincial and territorial privacy authorities recommend that workplace monitoring and AI be used only for fair and appropriate purposes, be reasonably necessary and proportionate, and include human oversight for consequential employment decisions. They also recommend privacy and, where relevant, algorithmic impact assessments.

NIST's AI Risk Management Framework adds a useful implementation principle: organizations should test, evaluate, verify and validate AI systems in the context in which they will actually be used.

6 Six questions before scaling

- What task or constraint is the technology meant to change?
- What happens immediately before and after the tool is used?
- What data, worker and manager training, governance and integration are required?
- Where must human judgment remain central?
- What baseline will show whether time, quality, output, burden, safety or another relevant outcome changed?
- What result would justify scaling, adapting or stopping?

7 Measure outcomes, not activity

Licences purchased, users activated, prompts generated and training sessions completed are implementation measures. They do not establish value. Outcome measures should be selected from the problem being solved: cycle time, rework, quality, throughput, error, administrative burden, worker experience, safety, customer outcomes, revenue, risk or another defined result.

BOTTOM LINE

The next phase of AI adoption is organizational. Access to technology matters, but realized value depends on whether organizations redesign work, build complementary capabilities, manage risk and measure outcomes in context.

Sources and evidence notes

1. Statistics Canada, [Analysis on artificial intelligence use by businesses, Q2 2026](#). Official national business adoption and implementation measures.
2. Statistics Canada, [Use of generative artificial intelligence tools among Canadian workers, March 2026](#). Official worker-level generative-AI use.
3. Statistics Canada, [Artificial intelligence adoption and productivity in Canadian firms](#). Firm-level observational productivity analysis.
4. OECD, [AI and Skills \(2026\)](#). International evidence on skills, training and worker outcomes.
5. International Labour Organization, [Generative AI and Jobs: A 2025 Update](#). Task-level occupational exposure and transformation framing.
6. Deloitte Canada, [State of AI in the Enterprise 2026](#). Canadian executive survey used for implementation context, not national prevalence.
7. Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, [Protecting Employee Privacy in the Modern Workplace](#). Canadian privacy-regulator guidance on workplace AI and monitoring.
8. NIST, [AI Risk Management Framework / AI Resource Center](#). Risk-management, testing, evaluation, verification and validation framework.

EVIDENCE STANDARD

Official statistical and regulatory sources are used for core factual claims where available. Survey, think-tank, consulting and international evidence is used as complementary context and is identified by source type. Descriptive associations are not presented as causal effects, and measures with different populations, definitions or reference periods are not treated as directly comparable.