

80% of Employees Want to Use AI More Than Their Jobs Allow

The "Activation Gap" could be leaving trillions in potential global economic gains unrealized, according to new research from Cognizant

TEANECK, N.J., Oct. 9, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- A new Cognizant workplace study has identified what researchers are calling the "Activation Gap": a wide and largely invisible divide between how much employees believe AI can enable them in their work and how much their jobs allow them to use it. In "[New Frontiers, New Frictions: Mapping the DNA of AI Adoption](#)" the findings suggest that the biggest barrier to AI's economic promise is translating employee willingness into effective adoption. Customization, integration and context engineering can help to close that gap.

The stakes are significant. Cognizant researchers estimate that a uniform 5% increase in global labor productivity could add roughly \$6 trillion to world GDP, nearly the equivalent of adding an economy the size of Japan's. Closing the Activation Gap is a potential path towards capturing some of that value and supporting the corresponding wage growth that frequently accompanies GDP increases. Moreover, workers' understanding of and belief in the improved productivity that AI can deliver is an early indicator of the potential for success.

"Our research finds that people are ahead of their employers," said Ravi Kumar S, Chief Executive Officer of Cognizant. "Willingness is the hardest part of any technology shift, and it's already in hand. What's ahead is the work of context: shaping tools to the rules, the workflows and the execution patterns of how a particular team gets things done. Context-specific tools perform where generic ones stall. That's the work we do with clients every day, and it's the opportunity in front of every company right now."

- **Eager adopters:** Four out of five employees say they want to use AI more than their current job permits.
- **The human factor:** Disposition— meaning how a person relates to technology, risk and work itself—is roughly six times more predictive of AI behavior than where they sit in the organizational hierarchy.
- **Navigators and Stalwarts:** 72% of workers fall into two archetypes, meaning they represent the highest-leverage opportunity: a targeted intervention aimed at these two groups alone could move the needle for the majority of a company's workforce. Navigators are willing AI users held back by organizational barriers, while Stalwarts are looking for a clear reason and business case to adopt AI.
- **Poor tool fit:** Up to 82% say their current AI tools don't fit their needs. 33% of Accelerators, power users who log the heaviest AI use, and Architects, the fastest-adopting employees, point to missing context and lack of customization as the top factor limiting their AI use.

Across every employee archetype, between 72% and 82% say their current AI tools don't meet their needs. Even Precisionists, highly active AI users and the most satisfied group in the study, reported only 28% satisfaction with their tools. In other words, the group that likes its AI tools the most still has roughly three unhappy employees for every satisfied employee.

Cognizant President – Americas, Surya Gummadi, said, "dissatisfaction with workplace AI tools isn't confined to skeptics or newcomers. It's a near-universal experience, cutting across employees who are highly engaged with AI and those who are not. We partner with our clients to identify and implement the AI solutions best designed to drive their business results. And our experience across thousands of activations, combined with this new research, aims to help us deliver at scale for even the largest organizations."

The study also found a gap in how AI training is delivered and received. Among Architects, 81% rate their training as effective, and 83% complete it. Among Holdouts, the group least inclined to use AI, those numbers drop to 56% effectiveness and 53% completion.

The training gap doesn't fully explain the satisfaction gap. Architects receive the most effective, most completed training and 87% say they turn to unsanctioned tools when their approved options fall short. These are two separate problems: training isn't reaching everyone equally, and even where it lands well, the underlying tools still aren't meeting people's needs.

Taken together, Cognizant's findings point to a workforce that is more willing, and more ready, to work with AI than most organizations currently assume. Giving employees access to context-specific tools and training to match is the clearest path to closing the Activation Gap and delivering increased real world business results using AI.

"For the technology to unlock the roughly \$6 trillion in potential GDP growth that AI could provide, companies must simultaneously provide context-specific tools to a receptive employee base while also improving their training programs to customize them for different personas and increase their effectiveness at producing real results," added Kumar S.

About Cognizant

Cognizant is an AI Builder and technology services provider, building the bridge between AI investment and enterprise value by building full-stack AI solutions for our clients. Our deep industry, process and engineering expertise enables us to build an

organization's unique context into technology systems that amplify human potential, realize tangible returns and keep global enterprises ahead in a fast-changing world. See how at www.cognizant.ai or @cognizant.

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