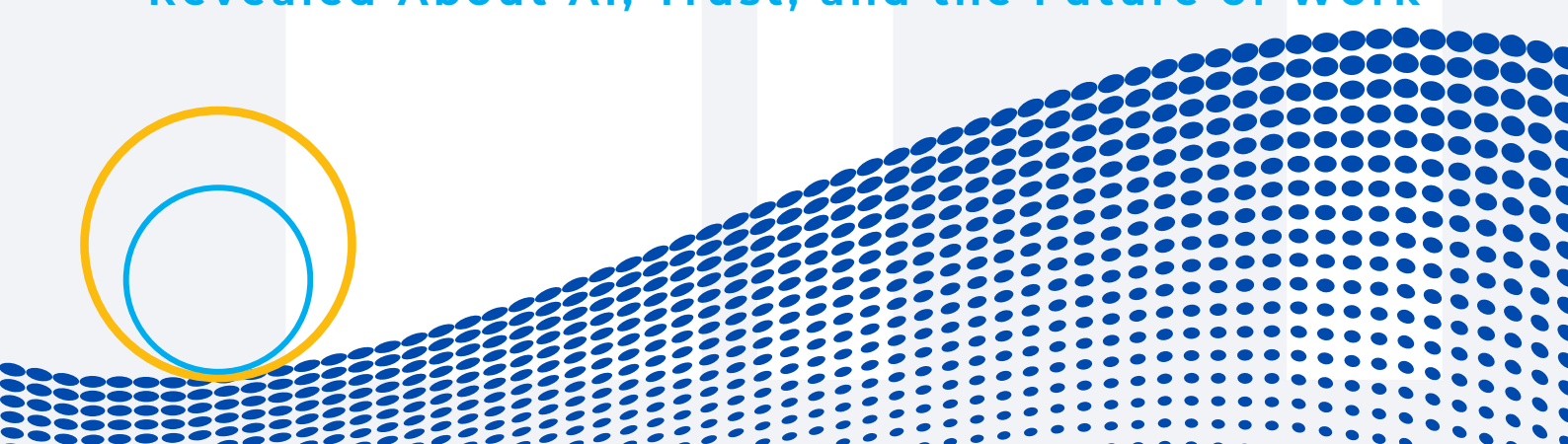




TRUST & AI ADVANTAGE REPORT 2026

Prepared by:
Evoloshen
Joy at work

What Senior Leaders from Around the World
Revealed About AI, Trust, and the Future of Work



Executive Summary

AI is no longer a future consideration — it is a present reality reshaping how organizations operate, scale, and compete. Yet for most leaders, the promise of AI is racing ahead of their readiness to deploy it with intention, trust, and cultural sensitivity.

Between November 2025 and March 2026, Evoloshen conducted interviews and structured surveys with CEOs across 9 countries and 10+ industries — from large-scale manufacturing and fintech to artisan crafts and environmental consulting. Each participant was asked seven core questions about AI adoption, trust, leadership, and culture. This report summarizes what we learned...

9+

Countries
Represented

10+

Industries
Represented

3.8/5

Avg. AI
Readiness

7

Core
Questions

Five themes emerged from the data:

- **AI is delivering real ROI in efficiency, speed, and cost savings** — but adoption is uneven and often reactive.
- **Trust is the central battleground** — both internal team trust and external credibility are under pressure.
- **The human factor is non-negotiable:** fear of job loss, authenticity concerns, and the 'AI theater vs. AI reality' gap are shaping culture.
- **Leaders are overwhelmed by where to start** — practical application beats abstract promise every time.
- **The leaders who are thriving treat AI as an amplifier** of their people, not a replacement.

Finding 1: Efficiency First — AI Is Delivering Real Results

The most consistent finding across all interviews: AI is generating immediate, measurable value in efficiency, speed, and cost reduction, across industries, company sizes, and geographies.

Top areas where leaders reported real ROI:

- **Writing, drafting, and document management** — agreements, contracts, proposals, marketing copy
- **Developer productivity** — bug fixes, code quality, testing, and speed of delivery
- **Customer-facing automation** — call centers, KYC/onboarding, HR self-service
- **Translation** — saving organizations tens or hundreds of thousands annually
- **Supply chain and RFQ processing**
- **Marketing content and design**

The CEO of a manufacturing company with over 10,000 employees described deploying AI 'sit-along agents' supporting call center staff in real time, drawing on hundreds of thousands of customer interactions and product videos. The result: faster resolution times and fewer escalations.

"What used to take a day to turn around a specific issue, now we can do in the space of an hour, AI has massively reduced time and output for us."
Greg Cussel, CEO, Xenet.ai

For global teams, the impact extends further, leaders consistently noted that AI has dramatically improved written communication quality for team members whose first language isn't English, enabling more confident and professional communication across borders.

Where It's Not Working (Yet)

Leaders were candid about limitations: numerical calculations, deep technical analysis, maintaining authentic brand voice, and AI hallucinations all require consistent human oversight.

"AI is strong at summarizing common knowledge but often meaningfully wrong in scientific subject areas where limited training information exists or where specific context is critical to understanding."
Martin Davies, CEO, Hatfield Consultants

Finding 2: Trust Is the Defining Battleground

If there is one word that runs through every interview, it is trust — trust in AI outputs, trust between leaders and teams, and trust between organizations and their stakeholders.

1

Internal Trust: Leaders & Teams

The biggest fear leaders expressed was not that AI would make mistakes — it was that AI use would become invisible, and that leaders would stop being accountable for their own thinking.

The solution multiple leaders agreed on: radical transparency. The CEO of a Canadian chamber of commerce actively rewards employees who disclose when they've used AI. The CEO of a Swedish financial services firm put it plainly: when AI shortcuts thinking rather than accelerating it, trust erodes fast.

“One of the finest senses of smell a human being has is a smell for authenticity. AI has the danger of undermining that — particularly when it comes to leadership. If it appears that leadership has abdicated their responsibility for thinking to an AI engine, the team will develop a sense of loss of trust.” Rich Sheridan, CEO, Menlo Innovations

2

Data Security & Confidentiality

A recurring concern, particularly among European leaders, was sensitive data being entered into AI systems with little clarity about where it goes.

A CEO at a major global manufacturer resolved this by providing employees with Microsoft Copilot — keeping data within a licensed enterprise environment rather than public tools. Many companies are following this approach.

3

External Trust: Authenticity & Credibility

Several leaders warned that AI-generated content is becoming a serious reputational risk. Careful readers can spot it — and when they do, it undermines the very credibility the content was meant to build.

“Authenticity is going to be the best currency in the future, as AI creates doubt about the legitimacy of almost everything.”

Patrick Stafford-Smith, CEO, North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce

3

Finding 3: People, Culture & the Human Factor

For all the efficiency gains AI is delivering, the leaders in this study were unanimous: the human dimension is irreplaceable. The question is not whether AI will change how people work — it already is. The question is whether leaders handle this change in a way that preserves or destroys culture.

“AI is like a servant, it’s helpful if you use it wisely. The joy, creativity, empathy, and compassion, these can’t be replaced by AI. That is the real experience of being human.”

NK Chaudhary, Founder & CEO, Jaipur Rugs

From Fear to Enthusiasm and Back Again

The emotional arc followed a recognizable pattern: initial fear and skepticism, followed by growing enthusiasm — often driven by younger employees — followed by a second wave of anxiety as real organizational implications became clear.

“A company's sustainability depends on profitability and the ability to withstand external shocks... but not at the expense of the planet or the community.” Anie Rouleau, CEO, The Unscented Company

The Workforce Displacement Question

The most emotionally charged topic across interviews was what to do with employees whose roles are being automated. The leaders managing this best share three qualities: transparency, empathy, and active investment in reskilling.

“You can’t say you care about your people and then announce mass layoffs. We’ve never done that. If we need our workforce to shrink, it happens through attrition and performance, never a headline number on a press release.”

Jason Lippert, CEO, Lippert Industries (LCI)

One CEO acknowledged a harder reality: his team is 70% smaller than a year ago, yet producing ten times the output. The psychological strain — especially for younger employees — requires active leadership to counter.

Finding 4: Leadership Is the Bottleneck

When asked what has been hardest about bringing AI into their organizations, leaders did not point to the technology. They pointed to themselves and their teams.

The Mindset Problem

The most common challenge: getting people to genuinely change their thinking — not just adopt new tools. This applies at every level, including the top.

The Application Gap

AI sounds compelling in the abstract. Finding the specific, narrow, practical application that will make a real difference in a particular business is genuinely hard.

“The biggest challenge is the mindset for everyone in my team, from senior leaders to junior staff. We are all educated to do one thing, and we think it works. But it doesn’t work anymore.”

Dinis Guarda, CEO Ztudium

“The hardest part for leaders is understanding the particular application for their business in a narrow, practical sense. You need tangible applications, not abstract promises about transformation.”

Jonathan Mosley, Founding Partner, Momentum Business Growth

One CEO described a pattern he observed repeatedly: ‘AI theater vs. AI reality. I get someone on a one-on-one and the house of cards falls quickly. Everyone says they have no idea what they are doing off the stage. The industry isn’t as far along as we think.’

The ‘Where Do I Start?’ Problem

For non-technical leaders, the sheer breadth of AI creates paralysis rather than progress. The most effective solution cited: build a small, dedicated internal AI team with clear roadmaps and accountability. Others let adoption emerge organically — making tools available without mandating them — finding this created higher acceptance and genuine buy-in.



AI Readiness: Where Leaders Actually Stand

Participants rated their company's readiness to use AI without losing its culture on a scale of 1–5. Average score: 3.8 out of 5.

Readiness Level	% of Leaders	Profile
5 — Fully Ready	33%	Active AI cultures; leaders personally using and championing AI.
4 — Mostly Ready	37%	Actively adopting; still iterating on governance and culture.
3 — In Progress	11%	AI pilots underway; organizational readiness catching up.
2 — Early Stage	11%	Includes some of the largest organizations — size ≠ readiness.
1 — Not Yet Ready	11%	Intentional and values-led; some of the most thoughtful voices.

"The real discussion around AI isn't the technology itself, but what data you can responsibly use. The upside grows with access to more data, but so do the risks around security, privacy, and control. Managing that trade-off is key to unlocking real business value."

Mats Röjdmark, CEO, Billecta AB

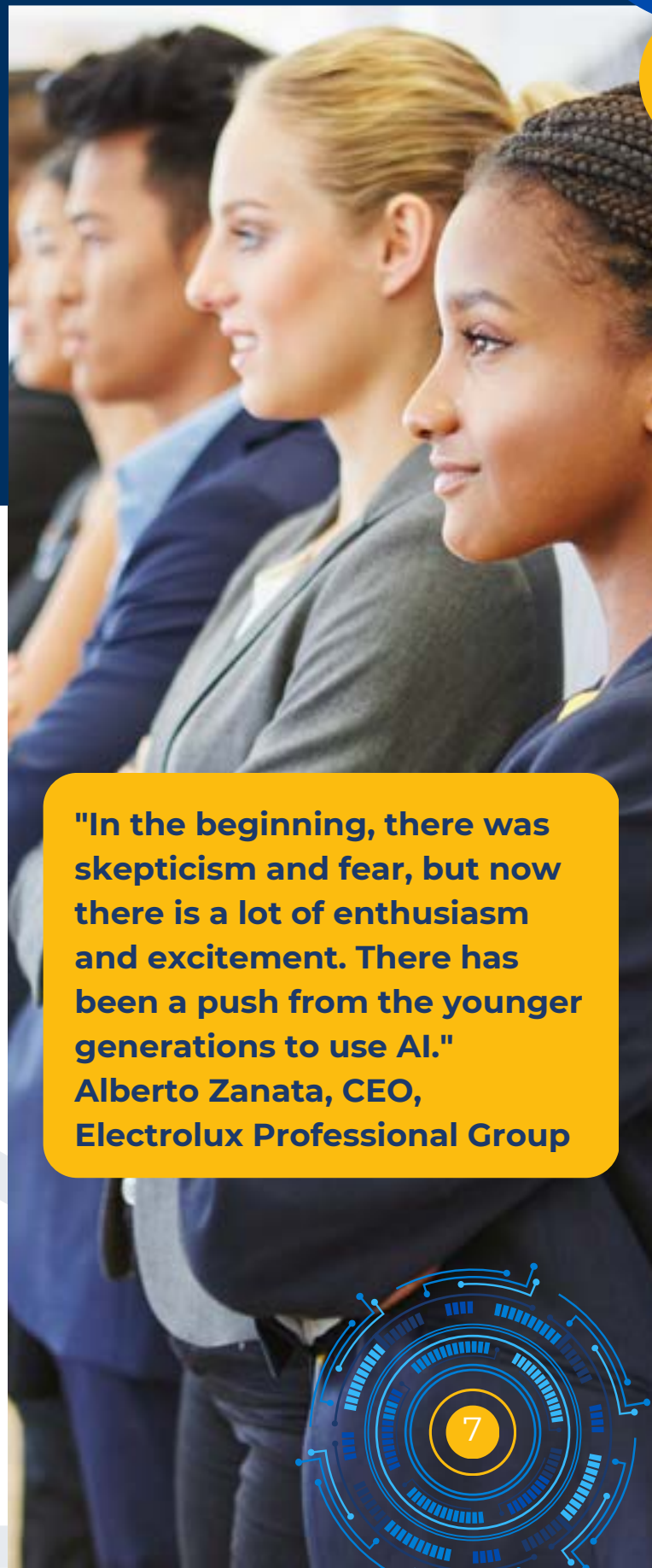
Looking Ahead: Success in 3 Years

The visions leaders described were remarkably consistent — and they were not primarily about technology. They were about people. AI becomes invisible infrastructure, like electricity. People do more meaningful work. Culture is preserved, not eroded. The human in the loop remains.

"In three years, I want every person on my team to feel that AI has allowed them to become more of who they are, that they are more needed than ever, not less."
Fredrik Åkerlind, CEO, Hayhouse

"We need to be careful that AI implementation is done in a way that aligns with one of our core values, which is trust. AI must be compatible with trust."
Sten Karlsson, CEO, Westpay AB

"In the beginning, there was skepticism and fear, but now there is a lot of enthusiasm and excitement. There has been a push from the younger generations to use AI."
Alberto Zanata, CEO, Electrolux Professional Group



6 Recommendations for CEOs



START WITH YOUR QUICK WINS

Don't transform everything at once. Start narrow: translation, document drafting, developer productivity. Build a proof of concept, get people excited, let the snowball roll.



LEAD BY EXAMPLE — DON'T DELEGATE AI ADOPTION DOWNWARD

The most effective organizations had leaders personally using AI and visibly learning alongside their teams. Credibility comes from participation.



MAKE TRANSPARENCY A NON-NEGOTIABLE NORM

Build explicit norms for AI use, disclosure, and human ownership of outputs. Reward honesty, not perfection. Undisclosed AI use erodes trust fast and is hard to repair.



TREAT WORKFORCE TRANSITION AS A CULTURE DECISION, NOT A COST DECISION

Handle AI-driven role changes through attrition, redeployment, and reskilling — not mass layoffs. How you do this will define your culture for years.



GOVERN YOUR DATA — NOW

Data security is the single most consistent blocker to AI adoption in this research. Leaders who have resolved this are moving faster and with more confidence. It's solvable. Prioritize it.



KEEP THE HUMAN IN THE LOOP ALWAYS

Every successful AI user in this study insisted on human review and human accountability at the point of decision. AI accelerates; it does not replace expertise, judgment, or context.



About Evoloshen

Evoloshen is a global consulting firm specializing in the intersection of culture, trust, and AI. Founded by Karin Volo, Evoloshen partners with leaders and organizations to build high-trust, high-performance cultures equipped to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Our Trust & AI Advantage research initiative was launched in 2025 to capture real, ground-level CEO perspectives on AI adoption, leadership, and culture — not the polished narratives from the conference stage, but the honest conversations happening in offices around the world.

In Partnership With

