Human Technology Institute

From Invisible to Involved

A Guide to Worker Engagement on AI

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The UTS Human Technology Institute (HTI) is an impact-oriented institute building human values into new technologies. Bringing together policy, legal and technical experts, HTI provides independent expert advice, policy development, capability building, and data science solutions to support government, industry and civil society.

Authors: Meredith Caldwell, Niels Wouters, Llewellyn Spink, and Prof Nicholas Davis.

Acknowledgement of Country

UTS acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal people and the Gamaygal people upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.

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Executive summary

When thoughtfully and successfully implemented in ways that support workers, artificial intelligence (AI) can deliver significant gains in productivity and performance. Organisations that invest in effective AI see, on average, a return of $3.50 for every $1 invested.[1] Among industry leaders, the return climbs to $8. But those results do not happen by accident. They rely on successful adoption by workers, which is more likely when workers are engaged in the design and deployment process.

Worker engagement leads to AI that more accurately reflects real needs of workers, aligns with their actual workflows, and supports meaningful organisational transformation. It results in better outcomes for organisations and their workforce. Organisations that engage workers are more likely to realise, and potentially exceed, the up to 37% expected productivity gains of AI over the next decade.[2]

Yet many organisations are missing the mark when it comes to engaging with workers on AI systems. HTI's research shows that workers often feel like Invisible Bystanders[3] in AI initiatives, as a result of engagement that is superficial or missing entirely. Few organisations have effective, structured mechanisms for worker engagement on AI, meaning workers are disconnected from decisions that directly affect their work. This is a missed opportunity, both strategically and from a governance perspective.

This report offers a practical roadmap to help organisations involve workers at every stage of the AI journey, maximising return on investment and long-term impact.

What is worker engagement?

Worker engagement refers to structured approaches that seek feedback and input from staff about the work environment, organisational change, or strategic initiatives, such as the adoption of AI.

Effective worker engagement is responsive, collaborative, and adaptive. It involves genuinely listening to the perspectives of workers and meaningfully incorporating them into the decision-making processes. Such engagement enhances collective ownership, builds trust and belonging, and ultimately drives behavioural change towards shared goals.

By contrast, worker engagement that is tokenistic and compliance-driven does more harm than good. It reduces trust among workers in an organisation's culture, AI objectives and programs, which ultimately leads to misdirected investment or a lack of uptake of AI solutions.

Why engage workers on AI?

Engaging workers delivers measurable benefits for organisations and their workers. It strengthens competitive advantage and profitability, and leads to better AI solutions rooted in problems and needs experienced by workers.

By involving the people who directly interact with AI systems, organisations gain practical insights into the opportunities and challenges they pose, leading to more relevant, efficient, and adopted solutions.

When does worker engagement add most value to AI programs?

An AI program refers to the full journey of developing, implementing, and integrating AI in an organisation. It involves more than just the final implementation of a solution. If engagement only happens at that point, leaders will have missed crucial input and buy-in from workers. Instead, worker engagement should happen throughout the different phases of the AI lifecycle:

1. Shaping AI purpose, where investment, strategy, objective, and roadmap are considered.

2. Co-designing AI solutions, where implementations take shape and are tested by workers, including by assessing impacts.

3. Embedding and governing AI, where solutions are released, their effectiveness is measured, and opportunities for continuous improvement are documented.

By engaging workers at each phase, organisations maximise the benefits of AI, minimise risks, and foster a culture of collaboration and innovation.

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How can leaders engage workers on AI for meaningful impact?

This report offers practical guidance to help leaders understand why, when, and how to meaningfully engage their workforce on AI. To support this, we include a suite of engagement templates that are practical and adaptable, using principles of effective engagement. Templates are included for the following engagement methods:

- **Dialogic interviews** are targeted, two-way conversations uniquely suited for uncovering deep, qualitative insights into the lived experience of work, workflows, or the impact of AI.

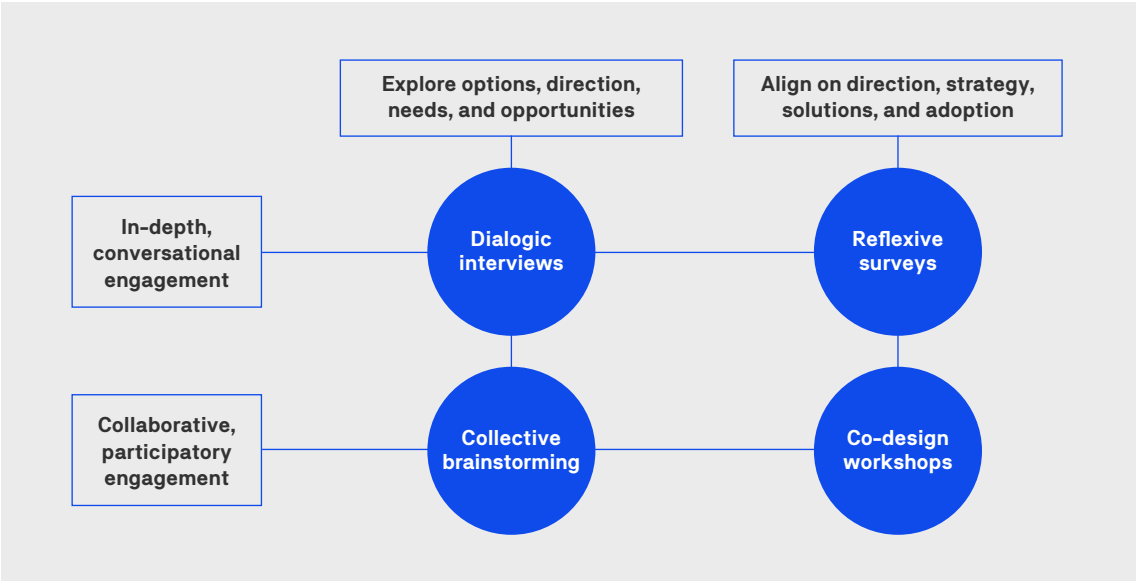
- **Reflexive surveys** are scalable tools to assess overall workforce sentiment, identify emerging needs, and collect actionable feedback from large and distributed groups. Surveys typically yield quantitative data that supports clear, comparative analysis.

- **Collective brainstorming** involves broad workforce participation, leveraging asynchronous and scalable online engagement, such as idea jams or innovation labs, to generate diverse ideas, reflections, and autoethnographic insights.

- **Co-design workshops** are interactive and collaborative sessions that enable teams to explore, refine, and validate AI solutions through structured activities, such as focus groups, hackathons, or deliberative workshops, either periodically or as one-off events.

Optimal engagement methods reflect where your organisation is at in the AI lifecycle, your purpose, and your preferred style of engagement. The matrix below can help you decide which methods best support your goals, whether you should explore opportunities or strengthen existing solutions, and whether you want deep conversation or broad collaboration. While these approaches are suggested, other methods could also be used depending on context.

Table 1: Recommended engagement methods based on engagement purpose and engagement approach.



Our templates help organisations collect, synthesise, and build on worker feedback throughout each stage of the AI adoption journey, creating a complete picture of worker experience and expectations.

Why engage with workers on AI?

Organisations are increasingly leveraging AI and automation solutions to streamline operations and enhance human decision-making and performance. These initiatives are often led by management and driven by business imperatives captured in measurable targets, such as cost savings, productivity gains, and improved efficiency and accuracy.

The potential impact of AI is substantial. It is projected to boost labour productivity by up to 37% by 2035,[10] with every dollar that organisations invest in AI estimated to yield an average 3.5x return.[11]

But these benefits are not guaranteed. They depend on how the technology is implemented, adopted and used in practice. HTI's *Invisible Bystanders* research found that workers are not meaningfully consulted or engaged in the rollout of AI solutions, and feel like the technology is being imposed on them.[12]

This is a missed opportunity. With 75% of workers already using AI at work,[13] workers are best placed to advise and assess how AI solutions can support and augment their daily tasks and roles. Yet, many organisations are failing to tap into this practical expertise.

Engaging workers should not be seen as optional. Worker engagement delivers better outcomes across organisations. With AI, it is particularly critical as it helps to build trust, drive adoption and unlock the full value of these systems.

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Why don't leaders engage workers on AI?

Many organisations struggle to put worker engagement into practice. Understanding the barriers that prevent engagement and the risks of failing to engage is critical for leaders who want to realise the full potential of AI investments. Many leaders face practical and cultural barriers:

- **Resource misalignment**. Engagement efforts often lack dedicated sponsorship, time, or budget, making them hard to prioritise or sustain.
- **Worker fears**. Employees may worry about criticism, job loss, or negative career consequences from speaking up.
- **Leadership fears**. Some leaders fear losing control, opening a 'can of worms', or discovering issues they're unsure how to address.
- **Knowledge gaps**. Workers unfamiliar with AI might struggle to provide detailed feedback, especially without training or context.
- **Time pressures**. Meaningful engagement takes time. Organisations that are under pressure to move fast see slower decision-making as a barrier.

These barriers are not insurmountable. They can be addressed with the right design, framing, and facilitation of engagements, many of which are outlined throughout this guide.

What are the risks of not engaging with workers?

When organisations overlook engagement or don't engage effectively, the consequences are significant. It leads to poor governance, poorly designed systems, low adoption, mistrust, and costly setbacks. The most common outcomes include:

- **Complacent use**. In the absence of good AI governance, workers may violate organisational policies, upload sensitive information, and rely on AI outputs without scrutiny. This complacency leads to significant material and reputational risks for organisations.[14]
- **Misdirected investment**. Without on-the-ground insights, AI projects solve the wrong problems or fail to align with real workflows, wasting time and capital.
- **Decline in organisational culture**. Excluding staff from decisions that affect them breeds mistrust, reduces morale,[15] and sparks resistance.[16] In some cases, this has escalated to industrial action, such as the 2024 Woolworths warehouse strike that cost $140 million and forced a system pause.[17]
- **Misaligned functionality**. AI systems built without worker input often do not fit actual needs, causing inefficiencies and workarounds that undercut the system's objective and performance.
- **Decline in worker wellbeing**. Leaving workers in the dark leads to anxiety about job security[18] and confusion about AI's purpose, fueling disengagement, stress, and burnout.

Engaging workers should not be seen as optional. Worker engagement delivers better outcomes across organisations. With AI, it is particularly critical as it helps to build trust, drive adoption and unlock the full value of these systems.

Worker engagement is a neglected but important area of AI governance. HTI's *Invisible Bystanders* report highlights the need to engage more with workers. Recent surveys by the Community and Public Sector Union and McKinsey stress the gap: only 1 in 5 workers have been consulted before the introduction of AI in their workplace.[19]

Engagement is essential because unlocking the true productivity benefits of AI is not as simple as replacing workers with AI or automation. Poorly designed or implemented systems may result in 'so-so automation', where technology displaces humans with little or no productivity gains. The best way to avoid this and achieve positive impact is through meaningful worker engagement throughout the entire AI lifecycle, from problem identification to solution design and implementation.

The legal context for worker engagement

Despite limited engagement of workers on AI to date, many organisations may be legally obligated to consult with workers under work health and safety laws, industrial awards and enterprise bargaining agreements. For example, most enterprise agreements require employers to consult with workers when introducing major technological or other changes that are likely to significantly affect those workers.

Even in the absence of a legal obligation, engaging workers on the impact of AI systems is essential for effective AI governance. Engagement with key stakeholders, such as workers, is highlighted in Guardrail 10 of the Australian Government's Voluntary AI Safety Standard,[20] which provides best practice guidance for safe and responsible AI use.[21]

There is now, more than ever before, a growing need to engage with workers on AI systems, for strategy, design, and implementation, to ensure these systems work alongside people. Without worker engagement, there is a risk of confusion, resistance, or missed opportunities.

Benefits of engaging with workers on AI

A growing number of Australian and global organisations report the success of worker engagement on AI . Their results are telling: hundreds of automated processes, millions of staff hours freed up for higher-level tasks, tailored and targeted training packages, worker-driven AI strategy and governance – the list goes on.

By engaging workers in designing and implementing AI, organisations foster employee buy-in, empowerment, and agency.[22] Overall, there are direct benefits across various domains, as listed below.

1. Better functional outcomes

Workers possess proximate knowledge of the systems they work with, giving them valuable insights into how AI should function in practice. Their involvement ensures that outcomes perform more effectively and address real needs. As workers contribute domain knowledge and practical feedback, AI systems align more accurately to actual workflows and thus seamlessly complement human work.

2. More trust in AI

There is a lack of trust in AI among Australians with only 36% willing to trust AI.[23] 54% of global workers do not trust the data used to train AI systems.[24] When workers help shape AI solutions, they gain visibility into functionality and influence guidelines for its use. Engagement, therefore, increases workers' confidence that the AI is fair, reliable, and aligned with their values, and it responds to common fears of hidden biases or unchecked algorithms.

Case study: Westpac

In 2023, Westpac launched a citizen developer program to empower employees to streamline their own work using low-code tools. Non-technical staff in finance, operations, and other teams began building simple apps and automations to eliminate repetitive tasks and improve efficiency.

Engagement. Rather than top-down directives, the initiative invited Westpac's 40,000+ employees to identify problems and co-create automation solutions. A dedicated Centre of Excellence supported teams by providing technical advice, monitoring project progress, and helping uncover underlying workflow issues. This collaborative approach strengthened internal capability and created a culture of shared problem-solving.

Outcome. Within a year, the program had reportedly saved over 1 million staff hours through over 300 staff-designed automations and digitised more than 400 internal service requests. Automation became a team-led activity rather than a management initiative, generating a steady flow of new ideas. The focus on enablement, not job loss, also helped ease fears and foster a more positive attitude toward new technologies.[25]

3. More trust in the organisation

With workers' mistrust of AI comes a broader challenge of mistrust in their employer's goals. Is AI being rolled out to replace people? Are current service offerings at risk of losing quality? By involving employees in discussions about AI's role in their work and addressing their concerns transparently, leaders create a work culture where employees are heard and feel that organisations are considering their interests when developing or deploying AI solutions.

4. Better governance

Over 40% of workers are heavily reliant on AI and over 30% admit to complacent and inappropriate use of AI.[26] These numbers stress the urgency for leaders to engage with their workers on AI in the workplace. It brings firsthand knowledge of how AI is used day to day, surfacing gaps between policy and practice, such as where AI is misused, misunderstood, or creates new risks. This insight enables organisations to embed worker perspectives in new or updated governance frameworks.

5. Greater buy-in for AI and automation

The large majority of workers indicate they would be more comfortable using AI if they had a hand in its creation.[27] As a result, instead of feeling that AI is being 'done to them', workers who are engaged feel a sense of ownership and are more inclined to support future rollouts in the long term. This buy-in enables organisations to gain financial benefits and increases productivity.

6. Increased AI literacy

Worker engagement reveals to employers which knowledge gaps exist and what must be done to improve AI literacy. Engagement also strengthens workers' own knowledge of AI. The case study of the Australian Public Service shows that worker engagement can inform external strategy and policy for responsible AI adoption.

Case study: Australian Public Service

In 2024, the Australian Government's Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) coordinated a 6-month trial of Microsoft 365 Copilot in the design and testing phase of an AI program. Over 5,000 staff across 60 federal agencies integrated and tested Copilot in their daily work. The aim was to see if AI could boost productivity and to surface implementation challenges in a real workplace setting.

Engagement. DTA applied a mixed-methods approach to engage with staff, from junior clerks to senior executives. They supported participants with training and encouraged them to experiment with Copilot for drafting documents, summarising content, and searching information across large datasets. Before and after the trial, DTA documented changes in attitude and productivity and collected feedback on the trial and future opportunities. Over 2,000 staff contributed feedback.

Outcome. Staff reported significant efficiency gains, saving approximately 1 hour per day on routine tasks. Many users found that AI sped up drafting emails, creating first drafts of reports, and conducting research.

Besides the success of the Copilot implementation, the trial findings also informed strategy and planning. Recommendations on AI implementation, adoption, and risk management will form part of the Australian Government's policy for the responsible use of AI in government.[28]

By engaging workers in designing and implementing AI, organisations foster employee buy-in, empowerment, and agency.[22]

What does effective engagement look like?

Engagement is only effective if it gives workers a genuine stake in AI programs, building the buy-in needed for success and protecting organisations against misdirected investment and poor returns. Engagement is not a one-off exercise; it is an ongoing dialogue between leaders and employees.

When done well, engagement moves workers from spectators to contributors, ensuring that AI programs are built on lived experience, not assumptions. Good engagement campaigns are built around three key principles:

Responsive

- **Needs-based**: AI is not always the solution to a problem. Start with understanding needs: what is working, what could work better, and how it relates to the overall context. This approach ensures that AI is a real solution to existing pains, not a gimmick or nice-to-have.

- **Contextualised**: Effective engagements are tailored to organisational culture and structure, the purpose of the engagement, and the broader operating environment. Choose methods in this context that are tailored to suit the needs of organisations and their workers.

- **Personalised**: It is critical to meet workers where they are at professionally, culturally, and technically. Use tools workers are familiar with and satisfied with, within working hours, and during non-busy periods. Consider past encounters with technology, leaders, and feedback.

Collaborative

- **Co-owned**: Empowering people to understand and resolve a problem creates meaningful organisational change. Build a sense of shared ownership over problems, proposed solutions, and risks to unlock new, varied, and innovative solutions.[29]

- **Inclusive**: Those using, creating, and procuring AI may have differing priorities and views. A worker may want more time for customers, a technology worker may want innovation, and a leader may want to grow market share. Include diverse views across functions, levels, and lived experiences to uncover causes, implications, and solutions that meet shared needs.

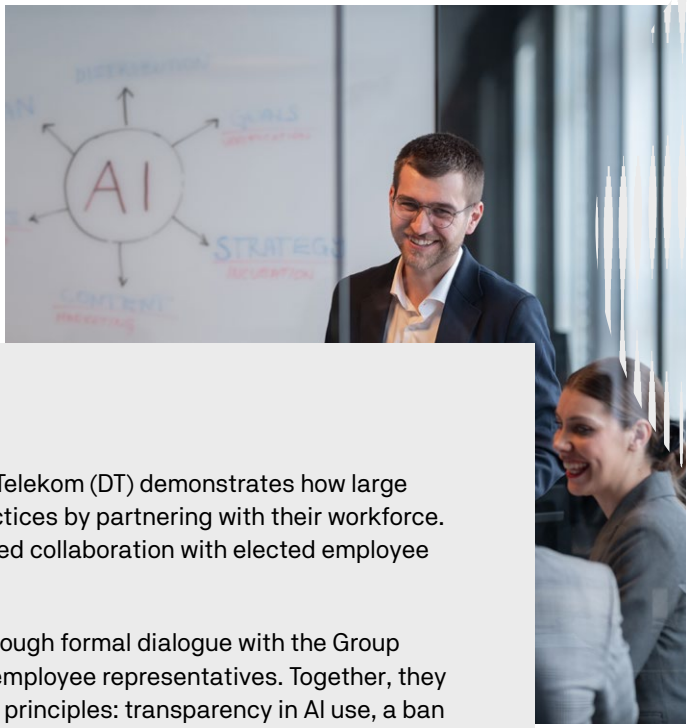
- **Interactive**: To gain rich insights, an interactive, and psychologically safe environment is needed that invites feedback without risk of reprimand, and supports mutual understanding. Model a consultative approach to build foundations of trust and enable effective sharing.[30]

Adaptive

- **Iterative**: Organisations need to be open to change. Remain continuously open to feedback and ideas, and create opportunities in timelines to ask if things remain relevant to workers, organisational objectives, or the market. Even if that means updating strategies and plans.

- **Influential**: Collecting input is one thing, but effective engagements result in action. This means that decision-makers enter the process with the intention of engaging seriously with the ideas and opinions of workers, reflecting on inputs and making decisions accordingly.

- **Reflective**: There should be opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and shared sense-making. Take time to pause, interrogate the data, and consider the views of workers when assessing beneficial impacts, potential risks of AI programs, and the success of their engagement.



Case study: Deutsche Telekom

With over 90,000 employees, Deutsche Telekom (DT) demonstrates how large organisations embed responsible AI practices by partnering with their workforce. A core pillar of their approach is structured collaboration with elected employee representatives.

Engagement. DT engaged staff early through formal dialogue with the Group Works Council (GWC), a body of elected employee representatives. Together, they co-created an AI Manifesto outlining key principles: transparency in AI use, a ban on surveillance, and the requirement that only humans make decisions about people. A joint AI committee, comprising management and staff, was established to oversee AI projects and facilitate ongoing employee involvement.

Outcome. By embedding staff in all AI-related decisions, DT built strong internal trust in its systems. Employees understand the role of AI, how it works, and how it supports their roles. This has led to smoother rollouts, better outcomes, and a workforce that feels actively part of shaping ethical, human-centred AI.[31]

When is worker engagement most effective?

It is critical that workers are engaged from the outset of an organisation's AI program to ensure they can participate in, understand, and shape strategic questions and directions. With long-term ripple effects of early engagement, the most valuable times to engage workers in an AI program are:

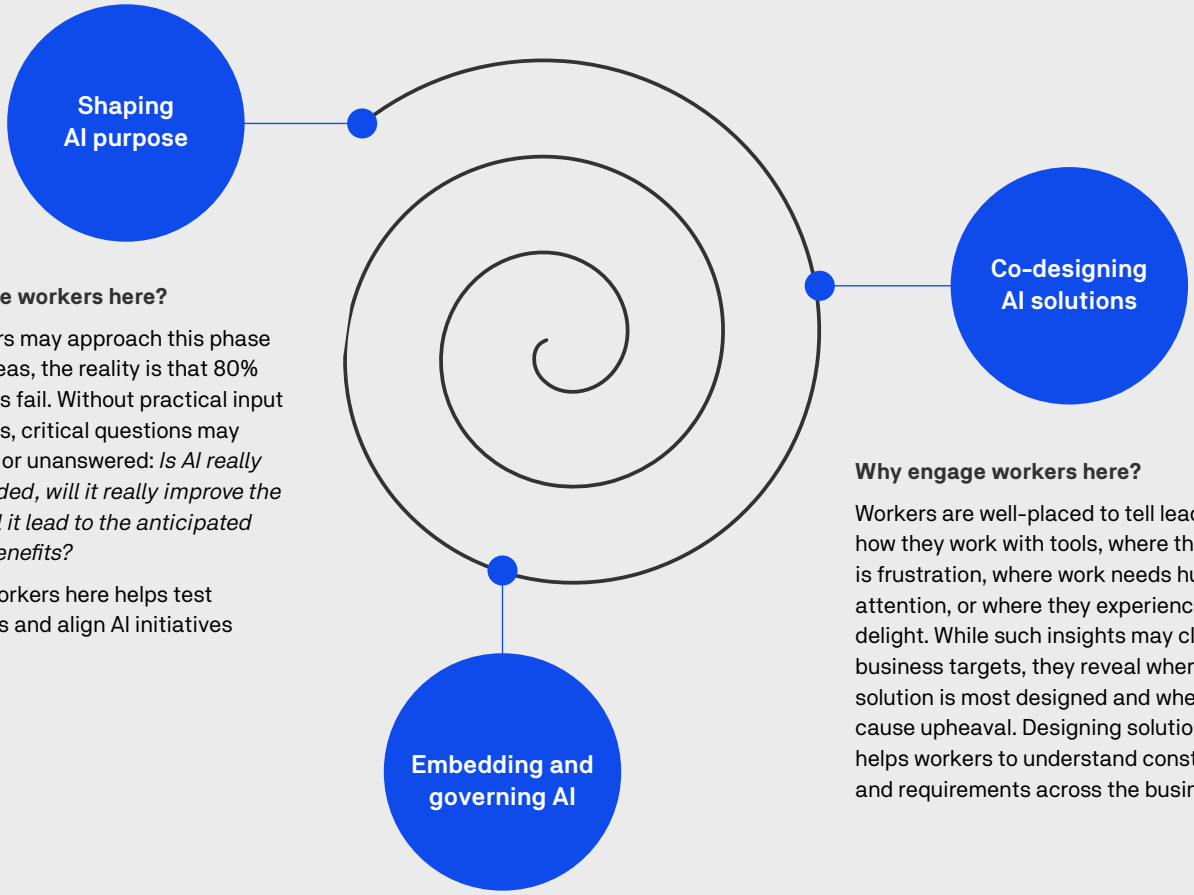
- **Shaping AI purpose**. This phase sets the scene for the AI program or its components, as leaders reflect on the organisation's direction, define a strategic plan, set objectives and key results, and outline a functional brief for AI solutions. Engaging workers in this phase helps ensure the strategy and program are grounded in real needs and priorities.

- **Co-designing AI solutions**. Every new AI solution, whether a strategic statement or a technical implementation, requires careful design and robust testing to confirm that it meets the needs or drivers identified in the strategy phase, integrates with existing practices, or enables successful adoption. Engaging with workers in design and testing leads to tools that work in day-to-day practice.

- **Embedding and governing AI**. As organisations roll out AI tools, they engage in change management activities, set up new governance structures, and monitor the use and effectiveness of their solutions. These are all opportunities for workers to engage. In this phase, it is crucial to consider engagement as continuous, from solution deployment and governance, throughout its lifecycle. Coupled with good tracking of productivity, sentiment, and solution usage, leaders better understand and build on people's ongoing needs.

Engaging workers in all phases of AI

Engaging workers in AI starts by gaining input into the strategy. This continues for designing the strategic plan and for completing or communicating it. Teams will return in a spiral fashion for each component of that strategy, getting worker input through the AI journey.



Why engage workers here?

While leaders may approach this phase with bold ideas, the reality is that 80% of AI projects fail. Without practical input from workers, critical questions may go unasked or unanswered: *Is AI really what is needed, will it really improve the efficacy, will it lead to the anticipated customer benefits?*

Engaging workers here helps test assumptions and align AI initiatives with needs.

Why engage workers here?

Workers are well-placed to tell leaders how they work with tools, where there is frustration, where work needs human attention, or where they experience delight. While such insights may clash with business targets, they reveal where a new solution is most designed and where it may cause upheaval. Designing solution also helps workers to understand constraints and requirements across the business.

Why engage workers here?

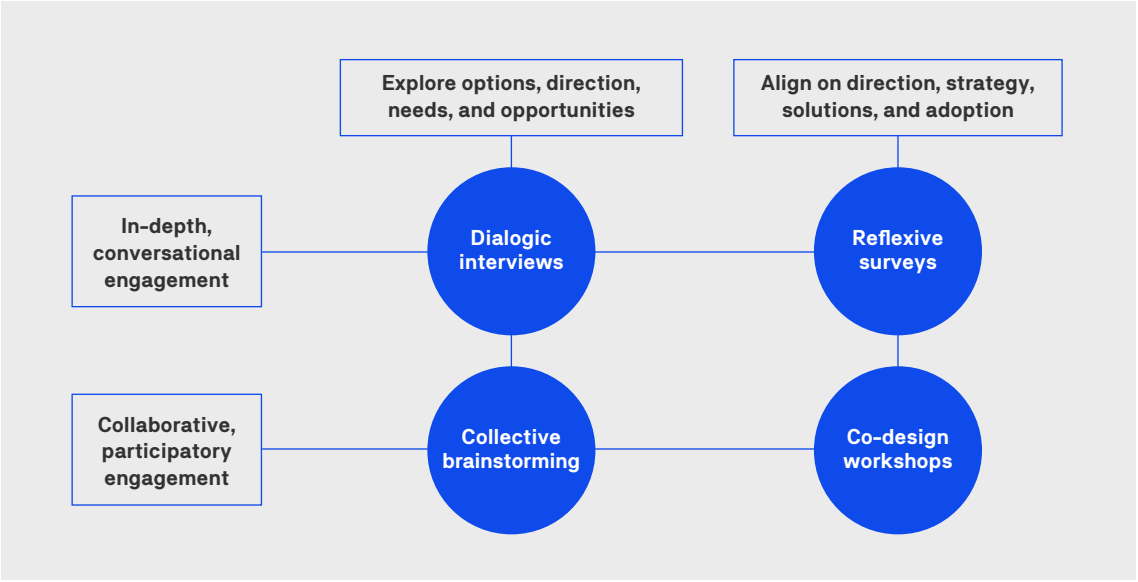
Enaging workers here is critical to ensure that AI solutions are adopted and trusted by those who use them. Workers provide insights into how solutions impact workflows, revealing hidden obstacles or new opportunities for deployment. The imperative of engaging workers in this phase is high: 70% of change efforts are known to fail due to lack of effective worker engagement.

How can leaders engage workers in AI programs for meaningful impact?

Organisations can apply a range of engagement methods to keep workers at the heart of AI programs. We highlight four practical and adaptable methods that generate meaningful insights across different stages of the AI lifecycle.

Effective worker engagement evolves alongside your AI program. Different methods help surface insights or build solutions, and often work best when layered or sequenced over time. The table below lists the methods by engagement purpose and mode of engagement.

Table 2: Recommended engagement methods based on engagement purpose and engagement approach.



Importantly, effective worker engagement does not mean consulting every individual. Instead, it involves seeking input from a representative and diverse section of the workforce, across levels of seniority, familiarity with AI and emerging technologies, areas of expertise or functions, and demographic backgrounds.

Each method described includes guidance on whom to involve to ensure a broad range of perspectives are captured. Besides the four methods in this guide, other methods may also be appropriate depending on your organisational needs or familiarity.

Scoping the opportunity space

Before engaging with workers, it is vital to define the scope through a strategic commitment and a clear articulation of the underlying problem.

Effective scoping involves shifting the mindset of leaders and key stakeholders from prescribing solutions (e.g. 'I want to use AI here') to clearly understanding and articulating the needs or problems they aim to address (e.g. 'How might we improve efficiency in process X?' or 'How can we reach the organisational target of Y?'). As a result, instead of fixating on specific implementations, the focus is on ensuring meaningful outcomes. It allows for open exploration of the whole gamut of possibilities, including not adopting AI if it isn't justified or needed.

By adopting an outcome-oriented approach, leadership can better commit to providing the right engagement approach, resources, technical capability, and capital expenditure needed to enable the change.

Importantly, effective worker engagement does not mean consulting every individual.

Dialogic interviews

Dialogic interviews are a prime method to collect high-level thoughts and themes to guide AI outcomes, such as strategic direction, functional design, knowledge and learning gaps, and ethical guardrails. Ideally shaped as one-on-one sessions (with one interviewer and one participant) or involving a small group of participants, they involve sitting down with employees, asking open-ended questions, and listening. This personal approach uncovers unique perspectives, personal stories, or detailed suggestions. It's a great way to get a rich, in-depth understanding of a worker's experience or an organisation's needs and opportunities.

Strengths	■ Collect deep, qualitative insights. ■ Embrace the flexibility of interviews to deep-dive and clarify complexities.
Weaknesses	■ Time-consuming to organise and run. ■ Recruitment must be thorough to ensure the right people are spoken to.
Common use case	For understanding needs and shaping a foundational understanding of AI and automation priorities within an organisation.
Suggested sample	6 to 12 interviews for smaller organisations; 12 to 50 for larger ones.
Estimated time	Allow 60 to 90 minutes for each interview, plus preparation and analysis time (approximately 2 to 3 hours total per interview).
Estimated cost	Costs vary significantly depending on who conducts the work — interviews facilitated and analysed internally are typically low-cost, while using external facilitators and analysts ranges from approximately $1,500 to $3,000 per interview, including research design, facilitation, analysis, and shareback. Costs per interview generally decrease with larger-scale programs, as design and analysis efforts are shared across multiple sessions.
Typical participants	Aim for diversity among senior executives (responsible for strategic planning, technology adoption, or organisational development), middle managers from relevant departments (to capture perspectives on change management and operational impact), and workers from relevant departments (to identify critical technology gaps and opportunities, and gauge attitudes towards automation of work). Aim for representation across the full spectrum of experience and interest in AI.

Dialogic interviews in action

A sample template for dialogic interviews to shape your organisation's AI purpose can be found in Appendix A: Guide to dialogic interviews.

Collective brainstorming

A simple way to tap into diverse ideas across the workforce is by using online platforms where staff share, build on, and vote for ideas at any time, from anywhere. These collective brainstorming methods, such as idea jams and innovation labs, let workers see their ideas progress into outcomes. The threshold for participation in collective brainstorming methods is low to include all perspectives and ensure a steady stream of new ideas. People suggest new ideas, vote on others', or add to ideas that others have suggested. This method suits organisations that want everyone to contribute at their own pace while helping leadership track themes and directions.

Strengths	▪ Broad reach, including remote and global staff, as well as those who may not otherwise participate. ▪ Always on, always available, and does not require facilitated sessions.
Weaknesses	▪ Requires community management to maintain engagement. ▪ The quality of input can vary widely. Well-defined scope and objectives are required.
Common use case	For organisations that have a scope and strategy for AI solutions. Collective brainstorming methods are very effective at collecting operational and functional context.
Suggested sample	6 to 12 interviews for smaller organisations; 12 to 50 for larger ones.
Estimated time	Allow 2 to 3 hours of upfront planning to define objectives, questions, and engagement prompts. The activity itself can run over 1 to 2 weeks, allowing asynchronous participation. Analysis and synthesis typically require 4 to 8 hours, depending on the volume and quality of input.
Estimated cost	If facilitated and analysed internally, costs remain low, mainly limited to staff time and licensing online platforms. If external support is used for setting up an online platform, moderation, analysis, and reporting, expect costs to range from $15,000 to $60,000, depending on the platform configuration, campaign monitoring requirements, and reporting needs. Economies of scale apply strongly: once set up, online collective brainstorming methods engage hundreds of workers at minimal added cost.
Typical participants	Workers and middle management across all relevant departments.

Collective brainstorming in action

A sample template for collective brainstorming in co-designing AI solutions can be found in Appendix B: Guide to collective brainstorming.

Co-design workshops

An effective way to explore problems across silos, refine ideas, and build shared ownership is to bring staff together, either in person or online, to collaboratively build an understanding of gaps, shape solutions, and give real-time feedback. Co-design workshops are interactive and collaborative sessions that enable teams to explore, refine, and validate AI solutions. These sessions typically involve structured activities, such as focus groups, hackathons, or deliberative workshops, either periodically or as one-off events. This method encourages teamwork, understanding, and ownership as staff work side by side, and often across departments, to craft outcomes.

Strengths	■ High level of employee ownership and engagement. ■ Rapid ideation and immediate feedback loops.
Weaknesses	■ Time-intensive to organise and run. ■ Requires skilled workshop facilitation.
Common use case	For organisations with a strong culture of participation and with resources to host interactive sessions.
Suggested sample	10–15 employees per session. The number of sessions will vary based on the size of your organisation.
Estimated time	Co-design workshops typically require 4 to 8 hours of preparation, including setting goals, designing the workshop, and formulating an analysis plan. Each session runs for 2 to 3 hours, with an additional 4 to 12 hours needed for analysis and synthesis, depending on the complexity.
Estimated cost	Workshops run by internal facilitators are more cost-effective, but they require staff with the necessary capacity and experience. If using external facilitators, costs range from $5,000 to $15,000 per session, covering design, facilitation, analysis, and shareback. Costs scale with the number of sessions and reduce per session when running a series of workshops using a consistent format and team.
Typical participants	Workers and middle management across all relevant departments. While senior executives can participate to stay on top of things, their attendance may also stifle candid feedback and must be considered in light of the key engagement principles.

Co-design workshops in action

A sample template for co-design workshops that let workers co-design AI solutions can be found in Appendix C: Guide to co-design workshops.

Reflexive surveys

Reflexive surveys contain targeted questions to capture opinions, experiences, or emerging needs. Unlike traditional surveys that focus on *what* people think or do, reflexive surveys ask *why* and *how*, encouraging workers to explore their assumptions, attitudes, and expectations. By fostering this introspection at scale, reflexive surveys capture sentiment and reveal underlying drivers of behaviour, surfacing insight into how AI shapes work and where new opportunities or risks may lie. This makes them a powerful complement to interviews and workshops, generating both quantitative data and nuanced reflections that deepen organisational understanding.

Apply the Delphi method[32] in a follow-up survey to seek worker feedback on previously collected anonymised group responses. This will enable workers to reconsider or deepen their views considering other people's insights. The Delphi method mitigates bias, reduces power imbalances, and deepens worker reflection.

Strengths	■ Scalable and cost-effective. ■ Quantitative data is easily compared over time and across cohorts.
Weaknesses	■ Requires community management to maintain engagement. ■ Time-consuming design and analysis, feeding back into reflexive survey follow-ups.
Common use case	For organisations that want to capture a cross-section of worker sentiment, deepen understanding of how AI is perceived and experienced, and surface reflective insights that explain why attitudes and behaviours exist.
Suggested sample	30–50% of employees for significant results.
Estimated time	Allow 4 to 12 hours to design a 10-minute survey, pilot it, and prepare communications. Surveys can remain open for 1 to 2 weeks, depending on organisational rhythms and reminders. Analysis and synthesis typically require 8 to 12 hours, depending on response volume and question types. Repeat surveys typically require far less effort, as much of the setup and structure is reused.
Estimated cost	If done internally, costs are minimal and limited to staff time and survey platform licenses (e.g. Microsoft Forms, Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics). If externally supported, including survey design, implementation, analysis, and reporting, expect costs of $35,000 to $90,000, depending on length, complexity, and reflexive follow-up requirements. Surveys scale extremely well: costs remain steady regardless of sample size.
Typical participants	Workers and middle management across all relevant departments. Participation from senior executives is optional, but it can be useful for identifying diverging priorities

Reflexive surveys in action

A sample template for reflexive surveys to support embedding and governing AI can be found in Appendix D: Guide to reflexive surveys. A guide for reflexive survey follow-ups can be found in Appendix E: Guide to reflexive survey follow-up.

Alternative methods

There are many additional ways to engage workers on AI, such as town halls, integrated system feedback loops, and other collaborative or collective activities to gain meaningful insights from workers.

What is important to remember is the application of the key principles of effective engagement when choosing and using the methods. The above set of methods contains those that the HTI considers most suitable to apply practically and achieve beneficial outcomes at various phases of the AI journey.

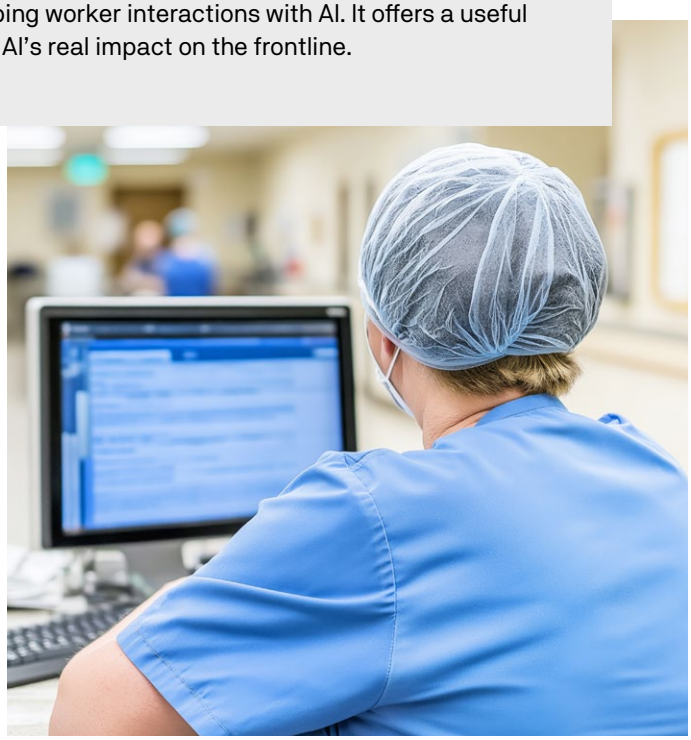
Combining methods for deeper insights: *Invisible Bystanders*

Some contexts may require combining several methods. Using multiple approaches in sequence can uncover deeper insights into how workers experience and respond to technological change. This layered approach supports responsive and collaborative staff engagement.

The *Invisible Bystanders* study,[33] commissioned by HTI and conducted by Essential Media, used a mixed-methods, human-centred design to explore how nurses, retail workers, and federal public sector employees experience AI and automation at work.

The methodology included in-depth interviews, a diary study, and focus groups. Participants reflected on their experiences over two weeks, offering rich insights into their evolving perceptions of workplace AI.

By adopting an autoethnographic approach, the study captured lived experience and helped surface the social and technical dynamics shaping worker interactions with AI. It offers a useful model for organisations wanting to understand AI's real impact on the frontline.



Worker engagement doesn't work if there is no mandate for it to be taken seriously. After completing engagements with workers, the critical task is to extract actionable insights from the data to influence outcomes.

So what happens after engagement?

Worker engagement doesn't work if there is no mandate for it to be taken seriously. After completing engagements with workers, the critical task is to extract actionable insights from the data to influence outcomes. Engagement must include exposing the outcomes and analysis to decision-makers to make sure they are and remain engaged.

Below is a generalised version of key steps to take to implement an impactful engagement campaign, applicable to any method and context.

Gather and organise data

1. Centralise all data. Group together responses, comments, suggestions, and ideas by themes such as common concerns, suggested opportunities, ethical considerations, and proposed solutions.
2. Link key insights to relevant departments or roles to understand organisational impact.
3. Look for recurring patterns and employee sentiment, highlighting frequently raised concerns or high-priority ideas.
4. For reflexive surveys, consider how findings will be shared: which ones matter, which ones benefit from iterated feedback. Consider how workers will re-engage with these findings, and why re-engagement is important.

Identify key insights and opportunities

1. Explore variations across teams, roles, or levels of AI literacy to capture diverse perspectives. Ensure such analysis does not jeopardise anonymity (especially when dealing with small participation sample sizes).
2. Share findings transparently with all stakeholders, inviting feedback from participants to build trust and clarity.
3. Evaluate which solutions or ideas are most feasible, impactful, and strategically aligned with your organisation's objectives.

Build and demonstrate impact

1. Amplify worker voices to influence stakeholders. Use direct quotes, video snippets, or annotated visuals to make insights real and persuasive.

2. Show how engagement shaped outcomes. Highlight where feedback directly influenced AI design, governance decisions, or improvements, connecting the loop between insight and action.

3. Ensure AI strategies or implementations address employee concerns, leverage identified opportunities, and align with ethical and governance standards.

Develop and communicate actions

1. Engage with workers to test prototypes of solutions and ideas as they take shape. Alternatively, re-engage using other methods or with different cohorts.

2. Test the outcomes of AI strategies or implementations at key intervals to assess the relevance and usability of the technology, its impact on needs and workflows, and measure productivity gains, while continuing to collect feedback from workers.

3. Following implementation, look for ways to quantify success and prove value of the engagement.[34]

4. Moving forward, schedule and run recurring engagements to track evolving employee needs, monitor changing attitudes, and continually capture fresh insights.

Where to start with AI worker engagement?

You are a leader who is committed to engaging workers to inform AI outcomes in your organisation. Below is a list of questions to gauge your readiness before, during, and after engagement, so you have the right resources and structures in place to engage your workers effectively.

Why?

- Why are you doing this engagement? What are you hoping to achieve?
- How open are you towards taking worker input into account when forming next steps?
- How open are you to uncovering unique needs, opportunities, and solutions?
- What problem or question do you have that workers' experience can help with?

When?

- When have workers previously been engaged? What did you learn?
- When in your AI lifecycle are you engaging with workers?
- Have you committed to refined, continuous engagement? Do you have space in your timeline for regular feedback to surface emerging needs and risks?
- Have you considered what else is happening at the time of the engagement for your workers?

Who?

- Who will be a part of the engagement?
- How have you ensured there is appropriate and diverse representation among the workforce? Can you invite people who have not been engaged before?
- Who needs to attend to enable collaboration and a shared ownership of the findings?
- Who sponsors the engagement and empowers workers to be involved?

What?

- What method best suits your organisation, phase, and resources to gain the insight you need?
- Have you made sure your engagement is free of corporate, technical, or legal jargon?
- What will you do to encourage people to participate in the engagement? Have you considered what is needed to create psychological safety and willingness of staff to be honest?
- What will you tell workers about the value of their input and how their input will be used?
- What human and operational resources will enable the engagement and its outcomes?

Where?

- Where will the engagement take place (in person or online)?
- Is the design of the engagement responsive and set up for collaboration and iteration?
- Where will you be, as a leader, to reduce power imbalances?

How?

- How will you gather and integrate the data? Do you have time assigned or a process in mind?
- How will the engagement be run? Is it tailored and personalised to your workers?
- How do the activities or prompts show workers they are contributing to a shared objective?
- How will data, findings, and insights be reported to leaders and back to workers?

Appendix A: Guide to dialogic interviews

Note: Dialogic interviews are at their strongest when they involve rich two-way communication, facilitated by an interviewer who can sensitively explore the topic of AI without needing deep technical expertise. Interviewers must comfortably deviate from a predetermined set of questions to probe deep and draw connections between other responses in the interview dataset.

Focus	Question
Understanding work and pain points	1. What are the most repetitive or time-consuming tasks in your day-to-day work? 2. Are there any processes that feel overly complex or inefficient? If so, where do you see the biggest bottlenecks? 3. What parts of your work require the most human judgment or creativity? 4. What parts of your work require the most collaboration across teams and departments? What's involved in that type of cross-organisational collaboration? 5. Which tasks or processes do you find most frustrating and why? Which tasks or processes do you enjoy most and why? 6. Are there any tasks where mistakes or delays frequently occur? What impact does that have on your work, team, or organisation?
Exploring potential for AI	1. How experienced are you currently with AI at work? How has the organisation previously supported the uptake of AI? What else can the organisation do to build your comfort with AI? 2. Are there any areas where technology could make your work safer, more accurate, or more enjoyable? 3. Are there any tasks that could be improved with AI? How would that help you, your team, and the organisation? 4. Are there any tasks that could be replaced entirely with AI? How would that help you, your team, and the organisation? 5. How might AI save you or your team time to focus on higher-value work or to improve service delivery? 6. Do you have any concerns about certain tasks being automated? If so, what are they?
Gauging organisational benefits and risks	1. In your view, how could AI benefit the organisation? 2. What's one thing you wish leadership understood about your work before making decisions about technology? 3. How could AI improve outcomes for customers or clients? 4. How might AI affect collaboration across the organisation (positively and negatively)? What should be done to encourage or prevent that from happening?
Identifying guardrails	1. What risks or unintended consequences may arise when AI is introduced into your work? Can they be mitigated? If so, how? 2. How should the organisation handle decisions where AI affects people (staff, customers, and clients)? 3. If AI makes a decision that affects your work, how would you like that decision to be communicated or reviewed?

Appendix B: Guide to collective brainstorming

Note: Collective brainstorming is most effective when participation barriers are low, allowing staff from across the organisation to share ideas freely and at their own pace. Facilitators should actively encourage ongoing engagement, manage discussions sensitively, and clearly communicate how ideas progress into tangible outcomes.

Focus	Activity	Outcome
Introduction and context	**Activity:** Program managers create a dedicated 'designing' space within an innovation platform. **Summary:** Provide a summary of previous findings or needs, key problem areas, and organisational goals related to AI that this solution aims to address. **Content:** Outline the type of solution that will be designed and the components that are likely to be present in the solution.	Participants understand the context and purpose of the idea submission process.
Idea submission	**Task:** Workers submit ideas to inform the design of the AI solutions (whether they be AI tools, policies, strategies, etc.) their convenience and within the parameters set in the introduction. **Question:** What is your idea for a solution, a component of a solution, or functionality? What does it solve?	A list of AI design requirements from workers.
Commenting and context	**Task:** Workers provide comments and context on submitted ideas. **Question:** What are your thoughts on this idea? How can it be improved? What additional context can you provide?	Insight into ideas and potential implementation challenges.
Voting and prioritisation	**Task:** Workers vote on which ideas they find most important. **Action:** Use voting features. **Question:** Which ideas do you think could have the biggest benefit?	A prioritised list of ideas to test with a wider audience.
Testing ideas	**Task:** Take prioritised ideas and collect comments from at least 3 people outside the platform. Return to the platform to share comments for improvements and iterations of the solutions. **Action:** Use voting and commenting features. **Question:** How might this idea work for you? What functionality should it contain to be most effective? What should be different?	Iterative refinement of ideas.
Assessment and evaluation	**Task:** A cross-functional team reviews the top-voted ideas and assesses them for feasibility, viability, and desirability. **Action:** Document the assessment process and scoring within the platform.	Selection of ideas to progress into development using data-driven decision-making.
Feedback	**Task:** Highlight key contributors, share preliminary findings from the assessment, and announce which ideas will progress. **Action:** Use announcements, email newsletters, or meetings to celebrate contributions and share updates. **Outcome:** Increased morale, transparency, and continued engagement.	Transparent decision-making and trust. Boost morale and build momentum.

Appendix C: Guide to co-design workshops

Note: Co-design workshops excel when workers collaboratively explore and refine ideas in a dynamic setting. Effective facilitation encourages open, interactive dialogue and iteration on emerging concepts. Facilitators must create a psychologically safe environment where participants actively contribute, question assumptions, and build on each other's insights in real-time.

Focus	Activity
Introduction and review	**Activity:** Briefly recap the problem, key findings from past engagements, and insights on identified needs. **Questions:** What stands out to you about the insights? **Action:** Participants note responses individually and share with the group.
Ideation of potential solutions	**Task:** Rapid ideation sessions in mixed breakout groups. **Question:** If you had a magic wand, what would you create to meet the needs we have as an organisation? **Action**: Brainstorm rapidly for 4 minutes, then rotate groups to build on others' ideas for 5 minutes. Constraining the time for the groups encourages creativity. Building on others' ideas leads to shared ownership and can be repeated further.
Prioritisation	**Task:** Participants vote on ideas based on identified needs. **Question:** Which ideas do you believe could have the biggest impact? Can we narrow the solution ideas or merge any of them into one? **Action:** Go around the room silently and vote on the ideas that would meet the needs and constraints shared earlier. There are many voting techniques, such as having 3 stars to place next to favourite items. **Task:** As a group, talk about the prioritisation and why certain solutions have emerged as frontrunners.
Prototyping and visualisation	**Activity:** Groups create visual prototypes or mockups of prioritised solution(s) (e.g. wireframes, flowcharts, storyboards, or simple descriptions). If there are multiple solutions prioritised, assign solutions to groups if needed. **Question:** How would this solution look and function in practice? **Task:** Consider user experience, workflow integration, and key interactions.
Policy and governance	**Task:** Groups discuss the potential impacts of the solution. They then note down necessary policies, guidelines, or governance structures to support the solution. **Question:** What policies or guidelines would ensure this solution is used ethically and effectively? For instance, people might require human oversight at critical phases, outcomes may need to be explainable to staff and customers, etc. **Task:** Integrate policy considerations into the prototype or solution design.

Testing and iteration	**Task:** Groups present their prototypes and solutions to each other. **Question:** What feedback do you have on this solution? What must be improved? **Task:** Incorporate feedback and iterate on the prototypes and solutions.
Action planning	**Task:** Groups develop action plans for further development of the solutions, including open questions, key steps, and resources. **Question:** What are the next steps to move this solution forward? What questions do we need answered on feasibility, desirability, and viability? What resources are needed? How do we bring this to life? **Task:** Identify potential pilot projects or testing opportunities.
Wrap-up	**Task:** Summarise key takeaways and collect feedback to outline next steps.

Appendix D: Guide to reflexive surveys

Note 1: This guide is optimised for pre-implementation data collection, providing organisations with baseline data on worker attitudes towards new AI solutions. We recommend reusing the same survey, with rephrased questions, to monitor attitudinal changes over time. For instance, the question 'Which unintended impacts (positive or negative) of the AI solution do you anticipate?' in a pre-implementation survey would be rephrased to 'Which unintended impacts (positive or negative) of the AI solution did you observe?' in a monitoring survey.

Note 2: Good reflexive surveys encourage workers to reflect deeper on their responses, by asking follow-up *why* questions. Several examples have been included in the below guide, but your context may require others. In addition, reflexive surveys provide opportunities for workers to be re-engaged and revisit their responses in the context of peer responses. While these follow-ups can consist of dialogic interviews, they can also be follow-up surveys, an example of which is included in Appendix E.

Focus	Question	Typical answer option(s)
Work benefits	What specific personal benefits do you anticipate from using the AI solution?	Open text
	Why do you expect these benefits?	Open text
	In your opinion, what are the top organisational benefits of this AI solution?	Multi-select, e.g. efficiency, accuracy, innovation, cost savings, employee satisfaction, employee wellbeing, client satisfaction, better customer service, improved accuracy, environmental sustainability, other
	Why do you think these organisational benefits matter most?	Open text
	Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - The solution will do exactly what I expect it to do - The solution will make my work more meaningful - The solution will make my work more enjoyable - The solution will improve teamwork and collaboration - The solution will improve operational efficiency	Likert scale, 1 – Strongly disagree to 5 – Strongly agree
	How effectively do you believe leadership has communicated the purpose and benefits of the AI solution?	Likert scale, 1 – Not effective at all to 5 – Extremely effective
	Which unintended impacts (positive or negative) of the AI solution do you anticipate?	Open text

Focus	Question	Typical answer option(s)
Uptake and confidence	How comfortable do you feel about using the AI solution in your daily work routine?	Likert scale, 1 – Very uncomfortable to 5 – Very comfortable
	What experiences or assumptions shape that comfort level?	Open text
	What, if anything, makes you hesitant to use the AI solution?	Open text
	Why does this feel like a barrier?	Multi-select, e.g. lack of training/support, low trust in AI decisions, poor fit with workflow, fear of job impact, doubts about accuracy, technical problems, privacy or security concerns, no hesitation, other
	Do you anticipate significant barriers in using the AI solution?	Single-select, yes, no, unsure
	Which barriers might you encounter when adopting or using the AI solution?	Multi-select, e.g. insufficient training, poor integration with workflow, poor integration with other tools, doubts about accuracy, technical issues, lack of support, low trust in AI, team resistance, other
	Have you received sufficient training or guidance on using the AI solution?	Single-select, yes, no, partially, not needed
	Which resources or supports would increase your comfort in using the AI solution?	Multi-select, e.g. training sessions, quick guides, hands-on workshops, peer support, other
	Would you trust decisions or recommendations made by the AI solution?	Likert scale, 1 – No trust to 5 – Complete trust

Focus	Question	Typical answer option(s)
Performance of AI solutions	How much of your weekly time do you estimate this solution frees up?	Single-select, e.g. a few minutes per week, up to 1 hour per week, 1 to 4 hours per week, 4 to 8 hours per week, more than 8 hours per week
	How reliable do you anticipate the AI solution will be in supporting your daily work?	Likert scale, 1 – Not reliable to 5 – Highly reliable
	Why is that your anticipation of the solution's reliability?	Open text
	How satisfied do you expect to be with the accuracy of results from the AI solution?	Likert scale, 1 – Very unsatisfied to 5 – Very satisfied
	In your view, how might the AI solution affect client or customer outcomes?	Open text
Continuous improvement	Are there processes in place for you to provide ongoing feedback about the AI solution?	Single-select, yes, no, unsure
	Have new work needs emerged since the AI solution was designed?	Single-select, yes, no, unsure
	Would you like more opportunities to contribute to the ongoing improvement of the AI solution?	Single-select, yes, no, unsure
	Why? Why not?	Open text
	What is one key change or improvement you would recommend regarding the current AI solution?	Open text
	Why do you think your key change or improvement is important?	Open text
	How optimistic are you about the ongoing role of AI solutions in your work?	Likert scale, 1 – Not optimistic to 5 – Very optimistic
	Based on your experience, would you support implementing similar AI solutions in other areas of work?	Single-select, yes, no, unsure
	If new needs emerged, please briefly describe them.	Open text
	Which other features or improvements may help you get more value from the AI solution?	Open text

Appendix E: Guide to reflexive survey follow-up

Note: For the Delphi style follow-up to be effective, respondents should be given a summary of anonymised, previous answers to some of the questions that are most important to your needs. Either the summary is provided upfront in the survey preamble or, ideally, on a per-question basis, such as by way of a simple visualisation.

Focus	Question	Typical answer option(s)
Work benefits	Reflecting on the organisational benefits identified by your peers, have your expectations changed? What new insights or questions did this raise for you?	Open text
	Were there any organisational benefits highlighted by others that surprised you or shifted your view? Please explain how and why.	Open text
Uptake and confidence	After reviewing how your peers feel about using the AI solution, has your own level of comfort or concern shifted? What reflections came up for you?	Open text
	Did other people's reasons for hesitation to use the solution resonate with or challenge your own thinking? How did that affect your perspective?	Open text
Performance of AI solutions	Did reading your peers' views on reliability make you reconsider your assumptions? If yes, in what way?	Open text
Continuous improvement	Were you surprised by how many of your peers do or do not want to be involved? Has this changed how you think about your own role in shaping AI?	Open text
	After reflecting on others' improvement ideas, would you adjust your recommendation? What stood out or changed your thinking?	Open text

Learn more about worker engagement with HTI

The AI Corporate Governance Program is an initiative of the UTS Human Technology Institute. Its aim is to broaden understanding of corporate accountability and governance in the use of AI. HTI's AI Corporate Governance Program analyses current and emerging AI governance practices and supports organisations to navigate this developing terrain.

HTI can provide further assistance with stakeholder engagement by supporting your organisation in planning and developing an engagement strategy and providing specialist resources to support.

For more information, or to join our AI Governance mailing list, please contact:

Professor Nicholas Davis
Industry Professor, Emerging Technology and HTI Co-Director
nicholas.davis@uts.edu.au

Llewellyn Spink
AI Corporate Governance Lead
llewellyn.spink@uts.edu.au

Gaby Carney
Senior Fellow, Strategic AI
gaby.carney@uts.edu.au

Myfanwy Wallwork
AI Governance Lead
myfanwy.wallwork@uts.edu.au

Lead author bios

Meredith Caldwell

Meredith is a thought leader in responsible tech and human-centred business. She has taught innovation and collaboration at Harvard DCE, run co-design sessions across Australia, USA, Europe, and Africa, acted in company executive roles, worked with leaders across industries and is an awarded entrepreneur. Her core expertise lies in co-designing AI strategic plans.

Niels Wouters

Niels is an expert in human-centred design and responsible innovation, working across AI, public policy, and social impact. He has led ethnographic research and co-design initiatives across Australia, Europe, and the USA, advising governments and industries on emerging technologies. With expertise in AI ethics, his work has been featured in international media and experienced by audiences worldwide.

Authors: Meredith Caldwell, Niels Wouters, Llewellyn Spink, and Prof Nicholas Davis.

Endnotes

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32 Dmitry Khodyakov, 'Generating Evidence Using the Delphi Method', *RAND* (Web Page, 17 October 2023) <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/10/generating-evidence-using-the-delphi-method.html>.

33 See note 3.

34 Collect metrics such as objectives and key results on adoption, technology success adoption rates, time savings, satisfaction improvements, strategic understanding, or reduced resistance to track changes in ROI, productivity, or trust.

Human Technology
Institute

For more information

Human Technology Institute
hti@uts.edu.au

University of Technology Sydney
PO Box 123
Broadway NSW 2007

uts.edu.au

UTS CRICOS 00099F