

How AI is Changing Early Careers: A View from Entry-Level Workers

EXECUTIVE BRIEFING
JANUARY 2026

Context

Entry-level roles have long been the bridge between education and employment. For many workers, they offer a first opportunity to apply learning in a real-world setting and begin building essential skills. For employers, these roles deliver vital day-to-day value through foundational tasks such as administration, analysis and research, while also developing future capabilities and leadership potential. Today, that bridge is shifting as Artificial Intelligence (AI) changes both who does entry-level work and how it is done. Routine tasks are being automated, expectations for entry-level roles are changing, and new skills are in demand. Workforce AI adoption is [uneven across sectors and regions](#), but its influence on how people begin and build their careers is already being felt globally. To understand how entry-level workers themselves feel about these changes, this briefing draws on the findings of the World Economic Forum’s Global Dialogue on AI and Entry-Level Work and PwC’s Global Workforce Hopes & Fears Survey 2025. The Global Dialogue brought together over 200 experts, public and private sector leaders, as well as Global Shapers, between July and September 2025 to examine how AI is transforming entry-level work. [PwC’s Global Workforce Hopes & Fears Survey 2025](#) provides one of the few global datasets that distinguishes entry-level workers as a distinct

respondent group. The survey’s findings draw on responses from 9,394 entry-level employees across 28 sectors, 48 countries and regions, and four generations of workers.

Overall, this evidence finds that early-career workers are asking what this change means for them. Some are already adapting, using AI tools to learn faster and build new skills. Others remain unsure which paths to follow or how secure their roles will be. Their experiences reveal the human side of a transformation that is often viewed through a more abstract lens of strategy and productivity.

Five key findings

1 Openness outweighs fear, but questions remain

Optimism and curiosity tend to outweigh concern globally. Across all regions, entry-level workers report being more curious (47%) and excited (38%) about AI than they are worried (29%). This overall balance points to openness rather than fear, but nearly one in three early-career workers still feel anxious about AI’s impact on their jobs. Optimism and concern coexist, reflecting both enthusiasm for innovation and uncertainty about what it means for their future.

FIGURE 1 **Top areas of optimism and concern about AI adoption among entry-level workers from the Global Dialogue**

	Optimism	Concern
1	Creation of new types of jobs	Reduced number of jobs
2	Productivity gains through augmentation of repetitive tasks	Lack of preparedness and support for adapting to change
3	Enhanced skill development for entry-level workers	Risk of socio-economic inequalities

Source: World Economic Forum, Global Dialogue on AI and Entry-Level Work, 2025.

FIGURE 2

Percentage (%) of entry-level respondents who answered “to a large extent” or “to a very large extent” when asked how each emotion describes their view of AI’s impact on their work (multiple answers possible).

	Worried	Excited	Curious	Confused
Argentina	24%	35%	50%	17%
Australia	31%	29%	34%	24%
Belgium	43%	31%	46%	31%
Brazil	36%	49%	58%	23%
Canada	30%	23%	34%	22%
China	33%	50%	52%	27%
Colombia	23%	45%	50%	19%
Czechia	31%	35%	37%	22%
France	42%	39%	51%	33%
Germany	30%	28%	44%	13%
Greece	38%	45%	48%	32%
Hong Kong	26%	20%	26%	16%
Hungary	27%	25%	39%	16%
India	34%	61%	56%	29%
Indonesia	25%	47%	58%	16%
Ireland	24%	23%	36%	24%
Italy	28%	45%	59%	22%
Japan	22%	30%	35%	22%
Malaysia	38%	56%	74%	27%
Mexico	24%	43%	46%	24%
Netherlands	29%	34%	47%	19%
New Zealand	28%	20%	29%	21%
Norway	23%	33%	40%	19%
Philippines	40%	45%	58%	25%
Poland	32%	38%	51%	32%
Romania	24%	32%	47%	21%
Singapore	29%	30%	35%	22%
South Africa	27%	41%	56%	17%
Korea, Republic of	26%	40%	39%	23%
Spain	30%	35%	49%	28%
Sweden	28%	40%	44%	25%
Switzerland	31%	40%	56%	20%
Thailand	30%	49%	54%	21%
Türkiye	31%	52%	55%	32%
United Kingdom	21%	19%	29%	19%
United States	25%	28%	35%	18%
Viet Nam	21%	36%	48%	14%
Global	29%	38%	47%	22%

Primary emotion Secondary emotion

Note: Results for some countries are not individually shown for Figures 2 and 3, due to small sample sizes.

Source: PwC, Global Workforce Hopes & Fears Survey, 2025.

To understand this balance more clearly, the Global Dialogue explored what areas of AI adoption entry-level workers are most optimistic and concerned about (Figure 1).

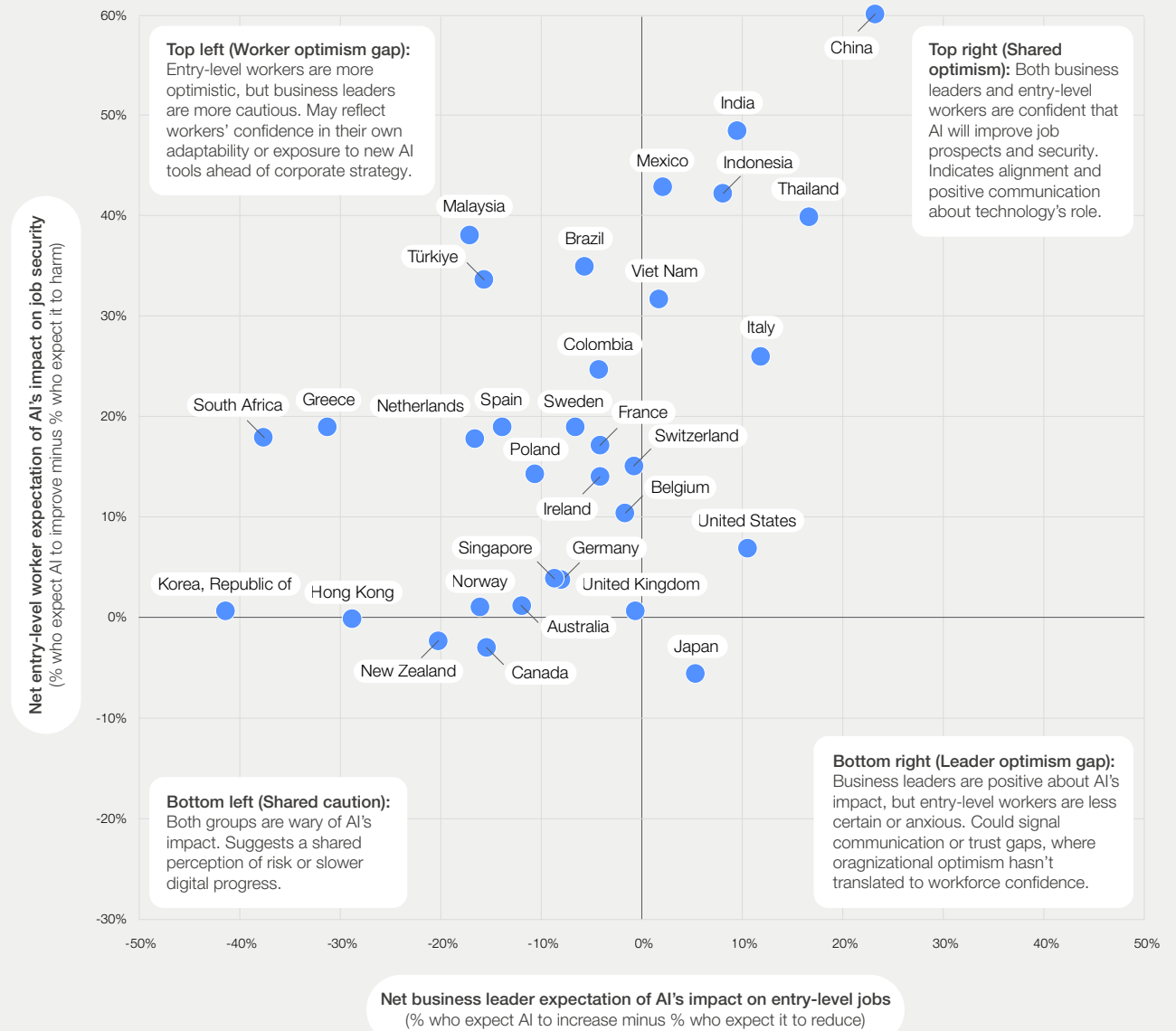
Sentiment differs by country (Figure 2), reflecting differences in labour-market structure, technology exposure and public discourse about AI. Excitement is highest in India (61%), Malaysia (56%) and Türkiye (52%), while worry is most common in Belgium (43%), France (42%) and the Philippines (40%). Although this analysis distinguishes entry-level workers as a group, variations across countries may still reflect demographic and contextual factors, with younger populations often expressing more positive attitudes toward AI.

2 Entry-level workers are more optimistic about job security, while business leaders expect more disruption

Entry-level workers are aware of AI's growing impact and recognize both opportunity and disruption. They are entering the workforce at a time when business leaders expect AI to create and cut roles in almost equal measure. 36% of executive leaders believe AI will increase entry-level jobs, while 38% expect a reduction. These mixed expectations contribute to uncertainty among younger workers about what lies ahead.

Job security is a defining uncertainty. 76% of entry-level workers say it is the most important factor in what makes a job a good fit, yet only 53% feel very secure in their current role, compared with 62%

FIGURE 3 Relationship between business leaders' expectations of AI's impact on entry-level jobs and entry-level employees' confidence in job security over the next three years



Source
PwC, Global Workforce Hopes & Fears Survey, 2025.

of all workers. Almost two in five (39%) entry-level workers believe AI will increase their job security over the next three years, while one in five (18%) expect it to decrease. This mix of optimism and uncertainty suggests that early-career workers are not apprehensive of change but unsure how AI will reshape their roles and opportunities.

The relationship between business leaders' expectations and entry-level workers' confidence varies widely across countries (Figure 3). Few countries demonstrate perfect alignment between the two groups. In most cases, one side is more optimistic or cautious than the other, with many countries listed in the upper-left quadrant of the figure, where entry-level workers are more positive about AI's impact on job security than business leaders. This may reflect differences in visibility and perspective, as entry-level workers experience change on the ground while business leaders tend to focus on longer-term structural shifts.

This divergence highlights that the challenge is not only technological but perceptual. Entry-level workers and business leaders are often interpreting the same transition through different lenses. For employers, educators and policymakers, the priority is to narrow these gaps by improving transparency about how AI will reshape jobs and where new opportunities are likely to emerge. Entry-level workers are not declaring themselves resistant to change; they are simply looking for clarity about their place within it.

3 Perception of entry-level work itself is being redefined

Beneath the uncertainty about job creation and loss lies a deeper shift in what "entry-level" means. Routine tasks that once gave newcomers their first foothold in the workplace are increasingly automated, while AI-enabled tools are expanding the scope of what early-career workers can do. Across sectors, many are moving from executing fixed processes to applying judgment, creativity and collaboration alongside technology.

Participants in the Global Dialogue discussions, described how the entry-level experience is becoming more complex. New workers are expected to contribute analysis, insight and adaptability from the start, often using AI tools that compress learning curves. For some, this creates new opportunities to demonstrate value and accelerate progression. For others, it removes the structured, repetitive tasks that traditionally helped them build confidence and understand workplace culture.

Alongside these changes, Global Dialogue participants also described a growing sense of entrepreneurialism among entry-level workers. Some noted that AI tools give workers more autonomy to explore ideas, experiment and create value beyond traditional role boundaries.

Survey data supports an emphasis on autonomy and creativity. Just over half (51%) of entry-level workers agree that their job gives them freedom to use their own initiative and judgement. Many also believe that AI will enhance their creativity and productivity in the years ahead.

4 Entry-level workers are learning fast, but many doubt the shelf life of their skills

Learning and development is key to setting entry-level talent on the right path. Yet many lack confidence that the skills they are gaining will endure. Entry-level workers are the professional cohort that least strongly believes that the skills they have learnt in the past year are helping their career (57%). This is lower than 63% of managers and 69% of senior executives. Additionally, only 53% of entry-level workers strongly agree that their manager supports them in building new capabilities. This suggests that while learning is happening, support and guidance may not always keep pace. Managers need to be equipped to develop people effectively, especially in more hybrid and technology-driven workplaces.

Examining the expected shelf life of skills further shows that 28% of entry-level workers believe that half or fewer of their current skills will still be relevant in three years (Figure 4). Across industries, the picture is broadly similar, suggesting that skill change is a shared reality for entry-level workers. The degree of concern varies slightly by industry. Entry-level employees in health, the public sector, and consumer markets and energy are the most likely to worry about the relevance of their skills. This reflects differences in how quickly technology and automation are reshaping roles across industries.

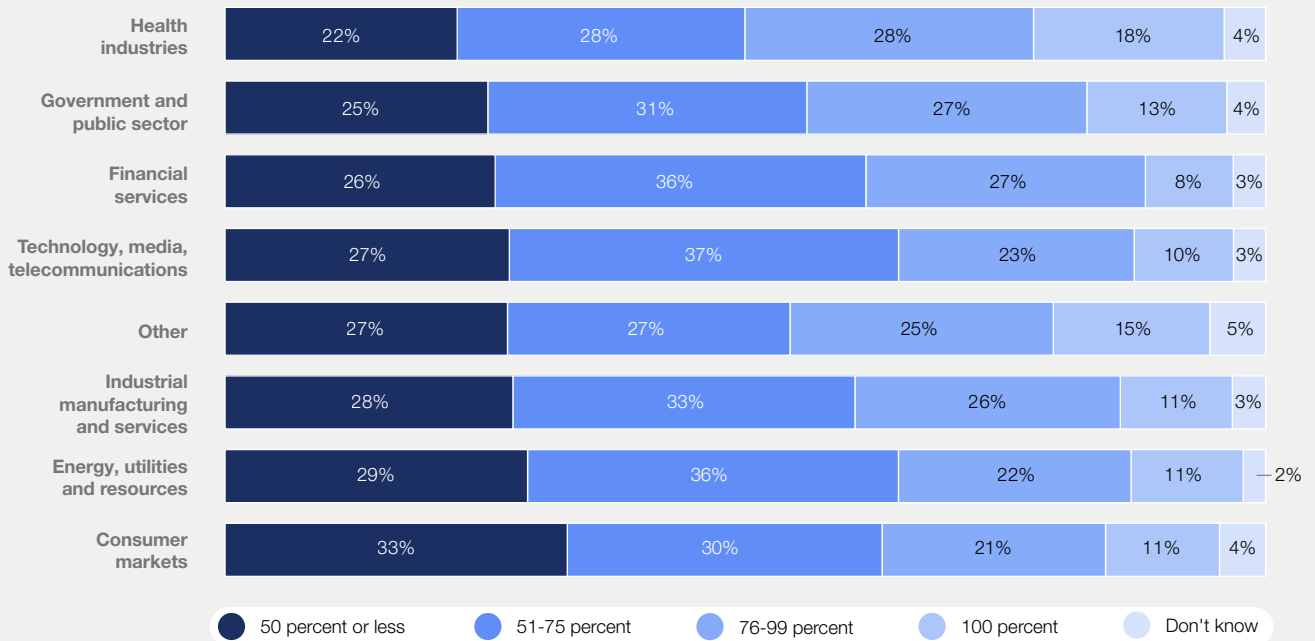
The findings together highlight the need for better guidance, support and communication: Entry-level workers appear guided by curiosity and the pace of change rather than clear signals or guidance from employers or education systems.

5 Older entry-level workers could be at risk of being left behind in AI adoption

Entry-level roles are often held by younger workers, but they also include people who are changing careers, re-entering the workforce or moving into new industries later in life. In PwC's Global Workforce Hopes & Fears survey 20% of entry-level workers were aged 45-60 (Gen X). Many of these roles may not sit on a traditional career ladder, for example, in service or retail sectors, yet they remain vital entry points into employment. This mix of generations brings varied experience, confidence and familiarity with technology. Understanding these differences is essential for creating inclusive strategies for workforce AI adoption and learning.

FIGURE 4

Entry-level worker response to the question: “What proportion of the skills you have today will be relevant to the way you expect to work in three years’ time?”, by sector



Source

PwC, Global Workforce Hopes & Fears Survey, 2025.

Note

The percentages in the graph may not add up to 100% because values have been rounded up/down.

The data shows clear variation in how generations are engaging with AI. As shown in Figure 5, older generations are significantly less likely to have used generative AI or AI agents at work in the past 12 months. Just over half of Gen Z entry-level workers have used generative AI, showing that adoption is still far from universal even among so-called “digital natives”.

Differences also appear in how workers view their own skills and future readiness. Despite similar levels of overall job confidence across generations, older workers are more likely to believe that the skills they hold today will remain relevant in the years ahead. 18% of Baby Boomers and 17% of Gen X think all their current skills will still apply in

three years, compared with 13% of Millennials and 8% of Gen Z. This may reflect greater confidence in existing expertise or a reluctance to see the need to reskill. Emotional responses to AI follow a similar pattern. Younger generations are both more worried and more excited about how AI will affect their work, while older workers tend to be less engaged on the topic.

If access to education and reskilling does not reach older cohorts, they may find it harder to compete for future entry-level roles where digital fluency is expected. [OECD research finds that many older adults remain excluded from the digital transition due to digital-skills gaps and limited access to age-sensitive training.](#)

FIGURE 5

Percentage (%) of entry-level workers who have not used AI tools at work in the past 12 months, by generation

	AI agents	Generative AI
Baby Boomer (1946-1964)	84%	76%
Gen X (1965-1980)	70%	63%
Millennials (1981-1996)	61%	52%
Gen Z (1997-2007)	57%	46%

Source: PwC, Global Workforce Hopes & Fears Survey, 2025.

What does this mean for employers, educators and policymakers?

The findings in this briefing highlight a workforce open to embracing change but uncertain about how to navigate it. This raises multiple questions for employers, educators and policymakers as they consider how to prepare the next generation of talent for an AI-enabled economy. Addressing these questions will be key to future talent readiness across industries as well as to ensuring that entry-level work continues to support inclusion, growth and opportunity across the workforce.

For employers

- How can communication from business leadership better align expectations between workers and management about how AI will affect entry-level jobs?
- Are managers equipped to support early-career workers through change, especially in hybrid and AI-enabled environments?

For educators

- How can curricula anticipate the skills most at risk of obsolescence and prioritize those that will endure and increase in demand?
- What models of partnership with business can deliver better education-to-employment transitions and ensure that education and training reflect how AI is actually being used at work?
- As AI reshapes early-career work, how should professional and regulatory bodies in sectors such as medicine, law and accountancy adapt their qualification standards?

For policymakers

- What policies can ensure that workforce AI deployment strengthens opportunity, rather than reducing pathways into secure employment?



Have a case study to share? This briefing is part of a broader effort by the World Economic Forum's Centre for the New Economy and Society, in collaboration with PwC, exploring how AI is reshaping early careers and how employers, educators and policymakers can respond. Organizations undertaking innovative work in this area are invited to contact the authors to share insights that may inform future research.

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The Forum is grateful to **Steffica Warwick** for leading the Global Dialogue and its background research.