

CHIEF

CHIEF X HARRIS POLL

Beyond Speed:
How *Women Leaders* Are Defining
the Human-Agentive Workforce.

Study Overview

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SECTION ONE:

Women aren't behind in AI—they're
defining leadership in the AI era

Women are not
behind in AI.
*They're building
it to last.*

Building governance frameworks, protecting human development pipelines, and deploying exactly the leadership qualities that will separate good organizations from great ones as AI handles more routine execution.

While the broader leadership conversation has fixated on AI adoption speed, women leaders have been quietly building something more durable: a philosophy that treats AI as an amplifier of human capability, not a replacement for it.

80% of women leaders are playing *active strategic roles* in their organization's AI efforts

Primary role in organization's AI efforts

Senior women leaders, Select one

Regulator: I focus on AI governance, ethics, and responsible implementation	31%
Orchestrator: I design and implement how humans and AI will work together across the organization	25%
Builder: I create and build AI solutions and products, or lead AI development	24%
Individual Operator: I use AI to improve my own work, but I'm not involved in my company's AI strategy	11%
Observer: I'm waiting to engage more significantly with AI	7%
N/A—my organization has no AI interaction or efforts at all	2%

Women are leading with governance.

This is the function that protects organizational integrity as AI scales, but also can provide a flywheel effect in the age of machine intelligence.

Women are already *building frameworks* for human vs. AI decision making

78%

of women leaders have personal criteria for **deciding what stays human vs. goes into AI** in their own workflow or team management.

This is not passive positioning.

It means that three-quarters of women have already operationalized the AI-human boundary question that most organizations are still debating at the board level.

SECTION TWO:

Women leaders *see what's coming* when organizations prioritize speed over people

Women leaders are calling out short-sighted leadership and calling in *thoughtful practice*

83%

of women leaders agree,
*“Being cautious about AI adoption
is a sign of good leadership, not
resistance to technology”*

68%

of women leaders agree,
*“Executive leadership and boards
at my organization prioritize AI
adoption speed over sustainable
workforce implementation”*

62%

of women leaders agree,
*“Executive leadership and boards
at my organization don't fully
understand what AI can
and can't do”*

The pipeline is breaking

69%

of women leaders say that their organization has reduced entry-level or early-career hiring due to AI capabilities

The breakdown, reduction of entry-level or early-career hiring:

Senior women leaders whose org interacts with AI, Select one

9%

Significant reduction (30%+)

30%

Moderate reduction (10–30%)

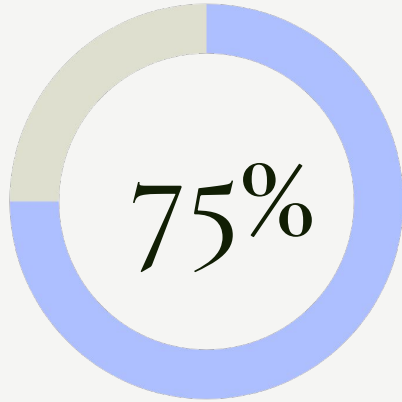
29%

Slight reduction (under 10%)

31%

Report no reduction at all

Women leaders expect big gaps in critical thinking if human development is not addressed in parallel with AI investment



of women leaders agree,
*"I expect the critical thinking gap
in the workforce to get worse
over the next 3 years"*



of women leaders agree,
*"We won't have capable managers
in the future if we don't invest in
developing humans now"*

The AI-only Trap

87%

have witnessed negative
Consequences across the organization
When AI is prioritized without
human development

Women take a *holistic view* of AI implementation. They notice teams that can execute, but can't think strategically.

42%

Teams that can execute but can't think strategically

41%

Decline in work quality despite productivity gains

40%

Loss of institutional knowledge and mentorship

38%

Erosion of team culture and trust

Their AI caution is tied to *protecting human judgment*

Why do women see this so clearly?

Women's caution about AI is intentionality. Their top two concerns, judgment erosion and capability loss, are precisely the risks that most AI governance frameworks are designed to address. Women aren't slow adopters; they're early governance architects.

Top concerns influencing women's approach to AI adoption | Senior women leaders, Select all that apply

Risk of over-reliance reducing human judgement	43%
Risk of over-reliance reducing human capability	38%
Data privacy and security risks	36%
Reputational risk from AI errors or misuse	30%
Lack of transparency in how AI makes decisions	29%
Impact on jobs and employee wellbeing	29%
Ethical concerns about specific AI applications	28%

**WOMEN LEADERS SEE
WHAT'S COMING**

Women are proactively *protecting organizational culture* as AI agents arrive

80%

Are taking action to preserve team dynamics, morale, or culture

77%

Are orchestrating AI agent accountability, evaluation, or reporting lines

Actions women leaders are taking in the last twelve months include...

Senior women leaders, Select all that apply

Ensuring human employees still develop skills when agents handle entry-level tasks	48%
Maintaining team morale and trust when AI agents take on visible roles	44%
Managing changing team dynamics when AI agents handle work previously done by humans	42%
Preserving organizational culture in a hybrid human-agent environment	41%
Evaluating AI agents alongside human team members	40%
Deciding who is accountable when an AI agent's output fails or causes harm	38%
Restructuring roles and reporting lines to account for AI agents	37%

**WOMEN LEADERS SEE
WHAT'S COMING**

SECTION THREE:

Women leaders are *thoughtfully building*
the workplace of the future

Women leaders are building toward a future where human and AI capabilities work in tandem

Their AI philosophy: Women leaders primarily use AI to “Amplify” and “Balance” human talent, rather than “Replace” | *Senior women leaders whose orgs interacts with AI, Select one*

Primarily Amplify

Use AI to enhance human capabilities that cannot be automated

35%

Balanced

Equal emphasis on substitution and amplification

32%

Primarily Substitute

Use AI to replace tasks previously done by humans, increasing efficiency

22%

Depends on Function

I take different approaches for different areas

10%

68%

Women leaders are bullish on the AI + Human Future

86%

of women leaders agree,
*"The leaders who will define the
next decade are those who
know how to maximize human
potential alongside AI"*

85%

of women leaders agree,
"Leaders who invest in both AI and
human development
will outperform those who
focus only on AI"

86%

of women leaders agree,
"AI should amplify human
capabilities and potential,
not substitute for them"

Women leaders expect *cultural and emotional nuance* to be most AI-proof

In your organization, which human capabilities do you believe will remain most difficult for AI to replace in the next 5 years? | *Senior women leaders, Select one*

Understanding unspoken cultural and emotional context	39%
Ethical decision-making when values conflict	37%
Building trust and relationships with stakeholders	37%
Making judgment calls in ambiguous situations	34%
Motivating teams through change	31%
Creative problem-solving for new challenges	29%
Navigating organizational politics and influence	27%
Persuading and negotiating with external parties	25%

86%

of women leaders agree, “I’m *more valuable as a leader because of my human skills, not despite them*”

80%

of women leaders agree, “AI is making human skills like judgment, empathy, and creativity *more valuable, not less*”

Women can see organizational risks *before they become crises*

71%

of women leaders are the first to notice emerging risks or problems before they become crises

Additionally, first to notice...

- 70%** Resistance to change beneath the surface
- 70%** Shifts in team morale or culture
- 69%** When someone is struggling but hasn't spoken up
- 68%** Early signs of burnout or disengagement
- 66%** When AI is being used as a crutch instead of a tool

Women are *proactively growing* and protecting their organizations

85%

of women leaders have taken team-level action like **establishing AI guidelines**, making **space for AI skills growth**, and having explicit conversations with their team about **what "good judgment" looks like** alongside AI tools.

Actions taken by women leaders in the past 12 months...

Senior women leaders, Select all that apply

- 48%** Created space for my team to develop skills that AI could technically handle (to build capability, not just efficiency)
- 46%** Established clear guidelines for when AI should and shouldn't be used in my team's work
- 45%** Had explicit conversations with my team about what "good judgment" looks like alongside AI tools
- 41%** Intervened when AI-generated work product didn't meet quality, ethical, or contextual standards
- 39%** Advocated for responsible AI policies or governance at the organizational level

SECTION FOUR:

In the AI era, *human relationships* and are
your competitive advantage

The power of this era won't be in your tools. *It will be in your network*

86%

of women leaders agree, “The collective intelligence of my network is a *competitive advantage* in the AI era”

84%

of women leaders agree, “*Being in community with like-minded women leaders* is more important to me than ever in the AI era”

Networks mean *faster learning and smarter decision making* for the AI era

84%

of women leaders agree, “I’ve *made smarter AI-related decisions* because of insights from my peer community”

83%

of women leaders agree, “I *learn more* from conversations with my peer leaders about AI than from traditional training”



The leaders best positioned for what's coming aren't just the most technically capable.

They're the most connected.

Thank you!

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Methodology

- This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Chief from February 25th to March 10th, 2026, among n=1,768 respondents. The data is not weighted.
- The sample is comprised of three distinct audiences:
 1. Senior women leaders, n=1,005
 2. Senior men leaders, n=503
 3. “Messy middle” Millennial women, n=260

Audience definitions:

1. **Senior women leaders** (n=1,005): Women and non-binary individuals with at least 15 years of corporate and/or non-profit experience, who have had a role at a VP level or higher. Those who are no longer in an executive corporate or non-profit role had to be current business owners, entrepreneurs, founders, fractional workers, or consultants to qualify.
2. **Senior men leaders** (n=503): Men with at least 15 years of corporate and/or non-profit experience, who have had a role at a VP level or higher. Those who are no longer in an executive corporate or non-profit role had to be current business owners, entrepreneurs, founders, fractional workers, or consultants to qualify.
3. **“Messy middle” Millennial women** (n=260): Women and non-binary Millennials with 8-14 years of corporate and/or non-profit experience, who currently hold a managerial role in one of those settings, but have not yet held a role at a VP level or higher.