

The AI Confidence Trap: Feeling Fluent Isn't the Same as Being Effective

August 19, 2026

A new WalkMe survey of 2,000 working Americans who use AI on the job finds 90% feel confident with AI, while only a quarter say it works on the first try.

SAN FRANCISCO, August 25, 2026. A confidence trap has taken hold in U.S. workplaces: employees feel fluent with artificial intelligence, but for many the results don't yet match that confidence.

The third installment of WalkMe's AI at Work Pulse Survey, which has tracked U.S. workers' use of AI since 2024, finds that while 90% of employees feel confident using AI, only 24.6% say it works on the first try, and 50.2% say they have spent more time trying to get AI to do a task than the task itself would have taken manually.

Half a workforce that has lost time to AI, task by task, is how enterprise AI investment fails to appear on the balance sheet. [SAP's Value of AI Report 2026](#), produced with Oxford Economics from a survey of 2,600 business leaders across 13 countries, found that 79% of businesses have experienced rework, delays, or backlogs caused by low quality AI outputs, and 67% are unconvinced their AI implementation is delivering to its full potential.

Confidence outpaces results

This wasted time is compounding with pressure to deliver. More than half of employees (51%) say AI has led their manager or team to expect more output in the same amount of time. Under that pressure, appearances become a survival skill: 33% of employees say they have pretended to be more skilled with AI than they actually are, and 32.5% have passed off AI-generated work as their own.

Notably, this is a persistent gap rather than an escalating trend. On the questions the survey has tracked since 2025, admissions fell year over year: the share of employees who say they have pretended to know AI in a meeting dropped from 45.2% in 2025 to 28.3% in 2026, and passing off AI work as one's own fell from 48.7% to 32.5%.

Workers are not becoming more deceptive; they are becoming more comfortable. Yet comfort should not be mistaken for trust. [WalkMe's State of Digital Adoption 2026](#), a separate study of 3,750 enterprise workers and executives at the same companies across 14 countries, found that only 12% of workers are fully confident AI tools understand the specific context of their work, and just 9% trust AI for high-impact decisions. Employees are at ease operating AI; they are far less sure it understands the work. The organizational pressure to appear fluent still outruns the active support to become fluent.

The gap reaches the top

The pressure to perform exists at every level of the organization. More than half of employees surveyed (53.6 %) say they have felt that a senior leader does not fully understand the AI strategy they are publicly championing. The people setting AI strategy are learning these tools in real time, just like the rest of the workforce.

"We do not have an AI confidence problem," **said KJ Kusch, Global Field CTO at WalkMe.** "We have a workforce that feels fluent and AI tools and features that are not meeting people where the work actually happens. Everyone, from the newest hire to the executive suite, is learning AI in real time. Acknowledging this reality is the first step toward aligning our strategies with actual tool proficiency."

The generational reversal

Gen Z is the most confident generation (94.1%) and also the most likely to overstate its skills: 45% of Gen Z workers say they pretended to be more skilled with AI than they are, versus 13% of Baby Boomers. That pretending caused a real problem at work, such as an output mistake, a missed deadline, a bad decision, or lost trust, for 31% of Gen Z, versus 7% of Boomers.

The same gradient appeared in 2025, suggesting the pattern is structural rather than a passing phase. The workers everyone assumes need the least help are paying the highest price for going without it. "Half the workforce has lost time to AI and a third say they have overstated their skills. That is a strong governance signal," **said Tal Carmi, Chief Information Officer at WalkMe.** "Organizations cannot improve what they are not measuring. To get real ROI from AI, we have to understand how it is actually being used, where it works, and where it quietly does not, then put help right where the work happens."

What workers want

Asked what would help most, employees consistently point to guidance and support built into the tools they already use every day, ahead of separate, standalone training: better integration between AI and daily applications (33.7%) and guidance built directly into those tools (30.2%).

That ranking reframes the problem. If confidence is already near universal, more training on AI basics will not move the results. Reliability in the flow of work will. The organizations that convert AI spend into returns will be the ones that treat adoption as a strategy in its own right by measuring how AI is actually used, fixing the points where work breaks, and building in support right where the work happens, rather than assuming a confident workforce is a proficient one.

Methodology

WalkMe's AI at Work Pulse Survey 2026 was conducted by Propeller Insights among 2,037 working U.S. adults who use AI on the job. Field dates: June 10-20, 2026.

About WalkMe

WalkMe, an SAP company, pioneered the world's leading Digital Adoption Platform, helping organizations navigate change across any application or system. Today it is the platform that drives AI adoption across the enterprise. Enterprise work stays fragmented across applications, and that fragmentation compounds as AI advances. Traditional training and vendor-provided help leave organizations managing change one application at a time. WalkMe guides people through change, brings AI into the flow of work, automates tasks and shows executives how workflows perform. Global leaders including IBM, Nestlé, Thermo Fisher Scientific, and the U.S. federal government trust WalkMe. WalkMe turns AI potential into AI performance.

Visit www.walkme.com.

Media Contact:

Melanie Pasch
press@walkme.com