HRPA | Human Resources Professionals Association

Bridging the Digital Divide

HRPA Survey Report

November 2023

Table of Contents

Introduction

The world of work is rapidly advancing, with new technology, like artificial intelligence (AI) playing a significant role in changing the ways in which organizations operate. HR professionals are facing new pressures to adapt at an unprecedented pace by keeping up with trends, adopting new tech and upskilling their workforce.

We invited HRPA members to take this survey to learn more about how technology has been impacting HR departments in Ontario. The survey follows a March 2023 survey on Generative AI in the Workplace, this time exploring if digital transformation is a priority for organizations, if, and how workplaces plan to make use of new technology and what benefits and challenges they have experienced in the process.

The results show that while digital transformation is a priority for over half of the respondents surveyed, the majority have not yet implemented strategies and policies to contend with new technology and bridge the growing digital divide.
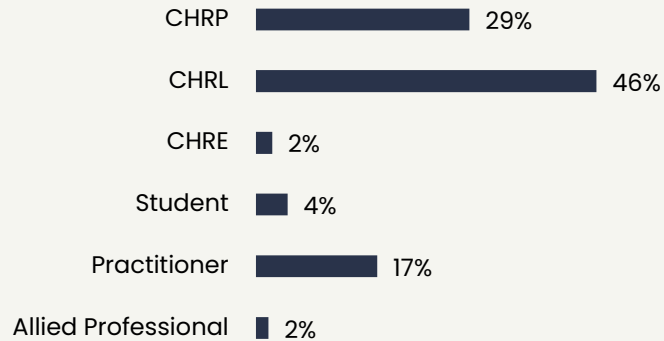
Reading the Survey Report

The survey was sent to all HRPA members and had 243 respondents. While the responses present some insight into how HR professionals are using technology in the workplace, the sample size is small, and results should be interpreted with caution.
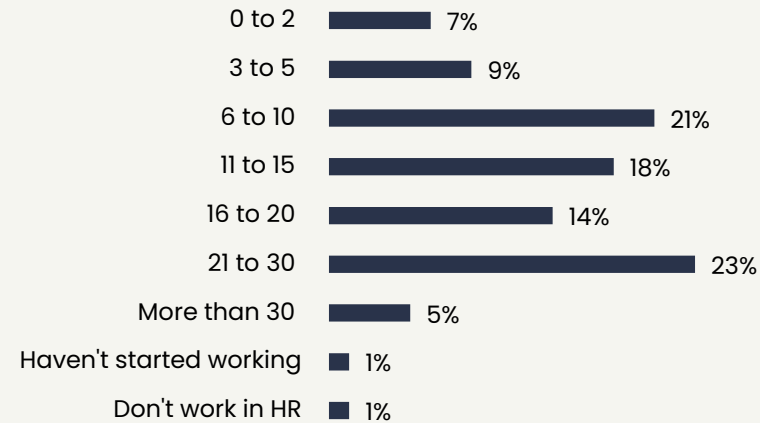
Survey responses are presented as a percentage, rounded to the nearest whole number. Responses to some questions may not total 100% due to rounding.
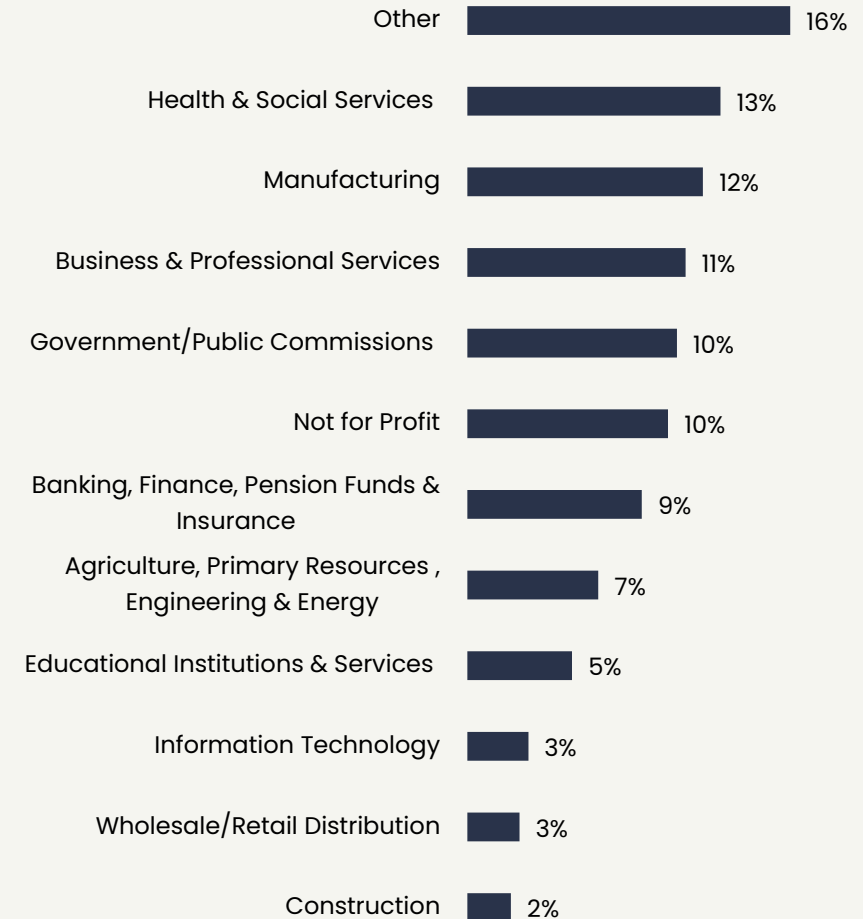
Survey Demographics
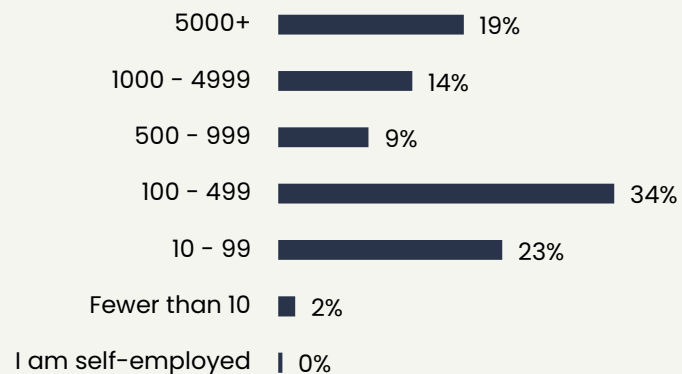
HRPA Registration Class (n=231)

Class	Percent
CHRP	29%
CHRL	46%
CHRE	2%
Student	4%
Practitioner	17%
Allied Professional	2%

Years Worked in HR (n=231)

Years	Percent
0 to 2	7%
3 to 5	9%
6 to 10	21%
11 to 15	18%
16 to 20	14%
21 to 30	23%
More than 30	5%
Haven't started working	1%
Don't work in HR	1%

Industry (n=230)

Industry	Percent
Other	16%
Health & Social Services	13%
Manufacturing	12%
Business & Professional Services	11%
Government/Public Commissions	10%
Not for Profit	10%
Banking, Finance, Pension Funds & Insurance	9%
Agriculture, Primary Resources , Engineering & Energy	7%
Educational Institutions & Services	5%
Information Technology	3%
Wholesale/Retail Distribution	3%
Construction	2%

Organization Size by Number of Employees (n=230)

Size	Percent
5000+	19%
1000 - 4999	14%
500 - 999	9%
100 - 499	34%
10 - 99	23%
Fewer than 10	2%
I am self-employed	0%

Sector (n=229)

- Public: 36%
- Private: 64%
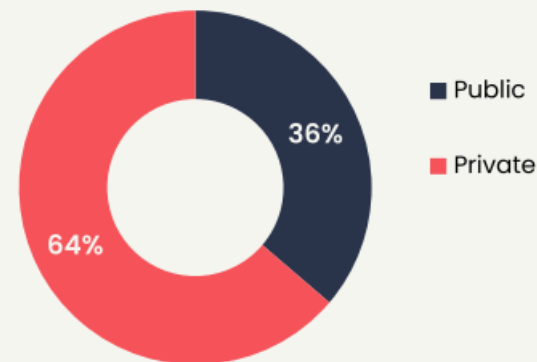
Key Highlights

① Prioritizing Digital Transformation

Leaders are beginning to prioritize digital transformation but there is still work to be done:

- 58% of respondents believe digital transformation is currently a priority for leadership in their organization.

- Half (53%) say their HR department has implemented digital transformation initiatives.

- Over two thirds (67%) say they do not have a policy in place addressing the use of AI in the workplace.

② Increased Adoption of Digital Initiatives

Organizations implementing digital transformation initiatives have made significant progress in the past year:

- The most common digital initiative that organizations have implemented (or are planning) is automating HR tasks that were previously manual.

- There was a 57% increase year over year among those improving data security and privacy as well as a 55% increase in those training employees to improve data literacy.

③ Using AI for HR Functions

Few workplaces are using AI for HR functions, but the experience has been positive for those that do:
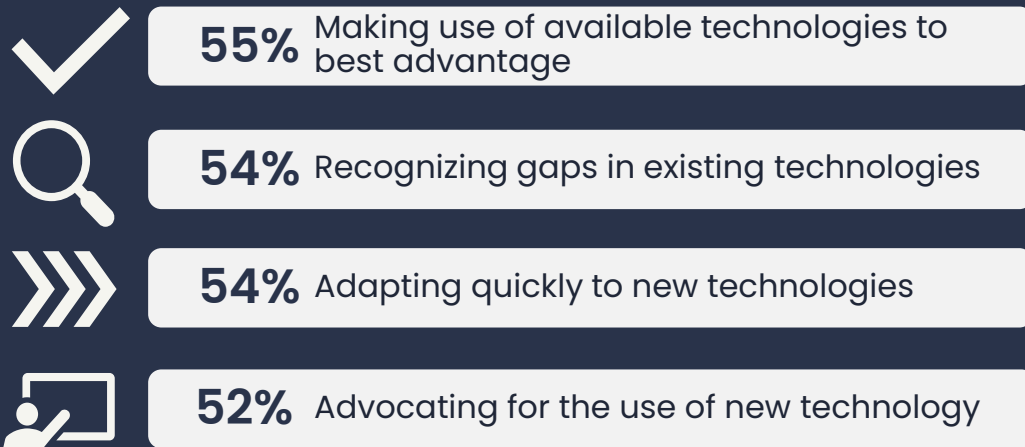
- Only 11% of respondents are using AI for HR functions, while an additional 13% are planning to.

- 38% say they have not experienced any challenges with the technology.

- Only 4% say they have not experienced any benefits.
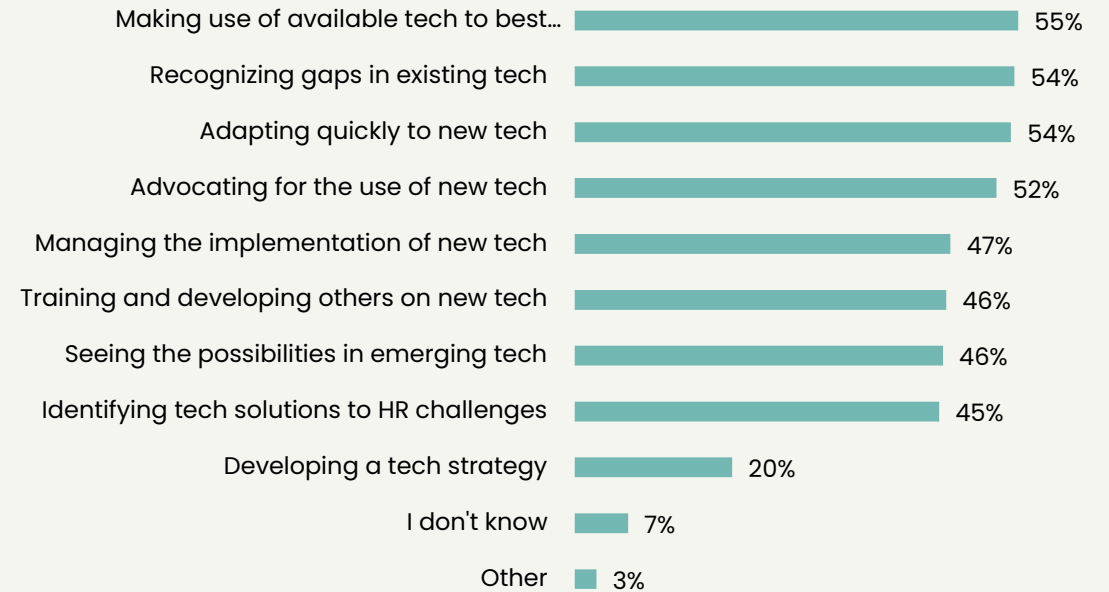
Preparing for a Digital Workforce

As technology advances at a rapid pace, nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents say their organization has implemented a strategy to adapt to a digital workforce, while half of respondents say they have not implemented one, nor are they planning to. Despite the low number of respondents with a formal strategy in place, 58% say they believe digital transformation is a priority for leadership at their organization.

Digital Transformation Competencies

Keeping up with the demands of digital transformation has also required HR professionals to draw on and develop a range of technology related competencies. The most common reported were:

55% Making use of available technologies to best advantage

54% Recognizing gaps in existing technologies

54% Adapting quickly to new technologies

52% Advocating for the use of new technology

Have you had to develop or draw on any of the following competencies when working with new and existing HR technology?* (n=226)

| Competency	%
Making use of available tech to best…	55%
Recognizing gaps in existing tech	54%
Adapting quickly to new tech	54%
Advocating for the use of new tech	52%
Managing the implementation of new tech	47%
Training and developing others on new tech	46%
Seeing the possibilities in emerging tech	46%
Identifying tech solutions to HR challenges	45%
Developing a tech strategy	20%
I don't know	7%
Other	3%

*Respondents could make multiple selections.

Has your organization developed a formal strategy to prepare for a digital workforce? (n=242)

- Yes — 24%
- No — 50%
- No, but planning to — 17%
- I don't know — 9%
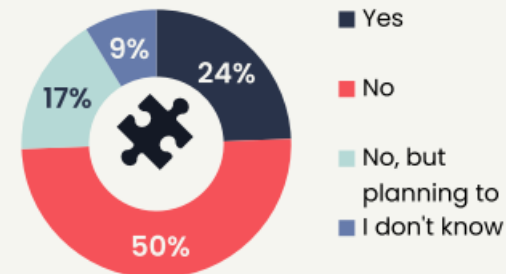
Do you believe digital transformation is currently a priority for leadership in your organization? (n=243)

- Yes — 58%
- No — 35%
- I don't know — 7%
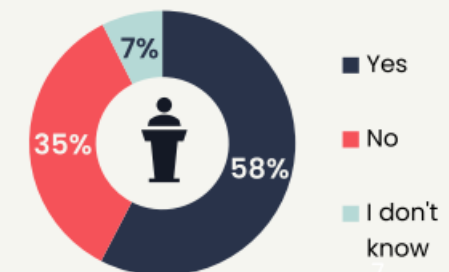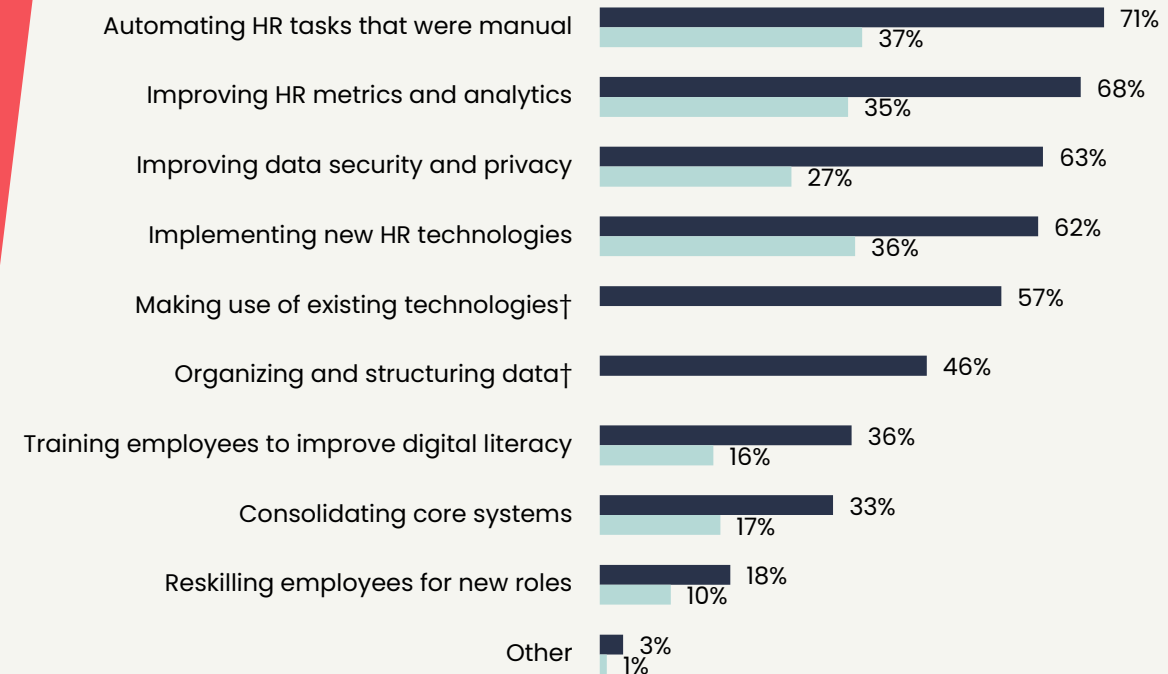
Digital Transformation

Over half of respondents (53%) say they have implemented digital transformation initiatives, while an additional 10% are planning to. The most common initiative was automating HR tasks that were previously manual. Also popular are initiatives that aim to maximize operational efficiencies by improving HR metrics and analytics.

When compared to results from HRPA's 2022 Trends Survey, responses show that organizations have made significant strides in implementing digital transformation initiatives in the past year, across the board. The biggest increase is seen among those improving data security and privacy (+57%) followed by those training employees to improve data literacy (+55%).

Has your HR department implemented any digital transformation initiatives? (n=243)

- Yes — 53%
- No — 30%
- No, but planning to — 10%
- I don't know — 7%
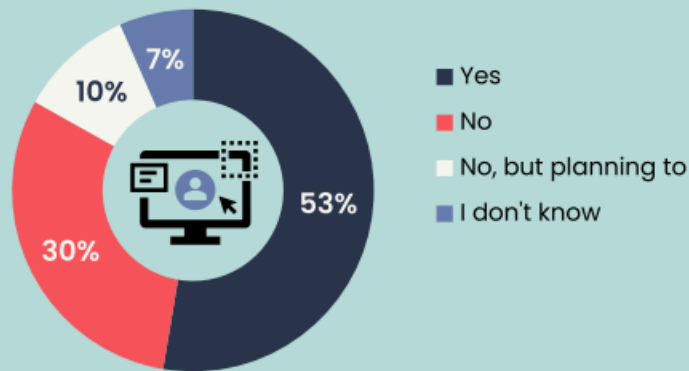
What HR digital transformation initiatives has your organization implemented or planning to implement?*

Initiative	2023 Digital Survey (n=152)	2022 Trends Survey (n=580)
Automating HR tasks that were manual	71%	37%
Improving HR metrics and analytics	68%	35%
Improving data security and privacy	63%	27%
Implementing new HR technologies	62%	36%
Making use of existing technologies†	57%	
Organizing and structuring data†	46%	
Training employees to improve digital literacy	36%	16%
Consolidating core systems	33%	17%
Reskilling employees for new roles	18%	10%
Other	3%	1%

*Respondents could make multiple selections.
†Option was not included in 2022 Trends Survey.

Q: In what ways does your HR department use or plan to make use of automation?

- **76%** - Internal processes e.g. payroll & benefits
- **75%** - Job applicant tracking
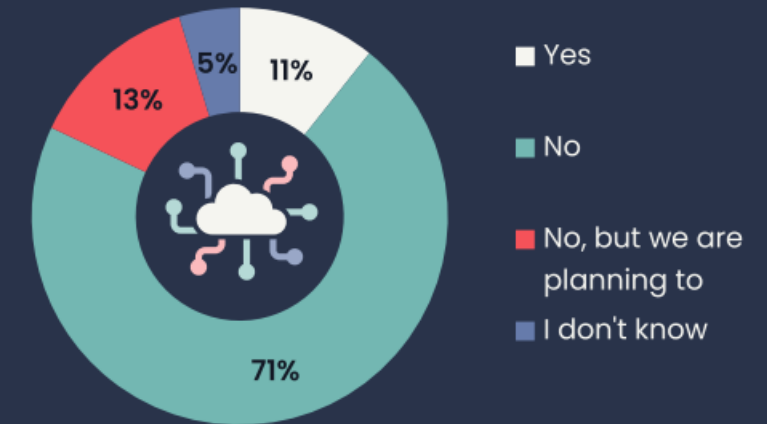- **70%** - Employee onboarding

AI Use in the Workplace

When asked specifically about the use of artificial intelligence to carry out HR functions, 11% of respondents say they are using it while an additional 13% say they are planning to.

Of those who are not using AI, the top reasons given were that they need to learn more about it (58%) and data privacy and security concerns (41%).

Only 13% said AI would not be helpful with the work that they do, suggesting that employers do recognize that AI has far reaching applications that would be useful, however they are not willing to be early adopters until they know more.

Does your organization currently use AI technology to carry out HR functions? (n=233)

- 11% Yes
- 71% No
- 13% No, but we are planning to
- 5% I don't know

Why is your organization not planning to use AI technology for HR functions? (n=164)

Need to learn more about it	58%
Data privacy & security concerns	41%
Concerns with the quality of its outputs	30%
Need to see more advancements	23%
It's too expensive	18%
It's not helpful with the work that we do	13%
Plagiarism & intellectual property concerns	13%
Other	9%

HRPA Survey Report: Bridging the Digital Divide

Workplace AI Policies

Whether organizations choose to adopt AI into their workflows or not, the growing prevalence and availability of this technology makes it easier for employees to access and use it in the workplace. The introduction of an AI policy is one way employers can set expectations with employees and limit the liability that can stem from its misuse.

The survey found that overall adoption of AI policies is low, with over two thirds (67%) of respondents saying they do not have a policy in place. 14% say that they do have a policy and an additional 14% are planning to implement one.

While most workplaces have yet to implement a policy, there are indications that this number is trending upwards. An HRPA survey in March 2023 found that less than 1% of respondents had a formal policy on the use of generative AI in the workplace. Although that survey was specific to a particular form of AI, the results show that a growing number of workplaces are starting to regulate technology's use through formal policies.

Does your organization have a formal policy in place addressing the use of AI technology in the workplace? (n=233)

- Yes — 14%
- No — 67%
- No, but planning to implement one — 14%
- I don't know — 5%
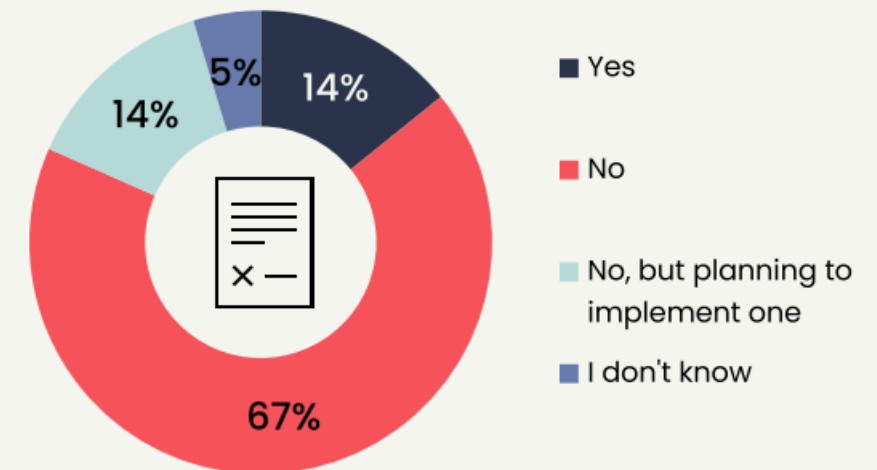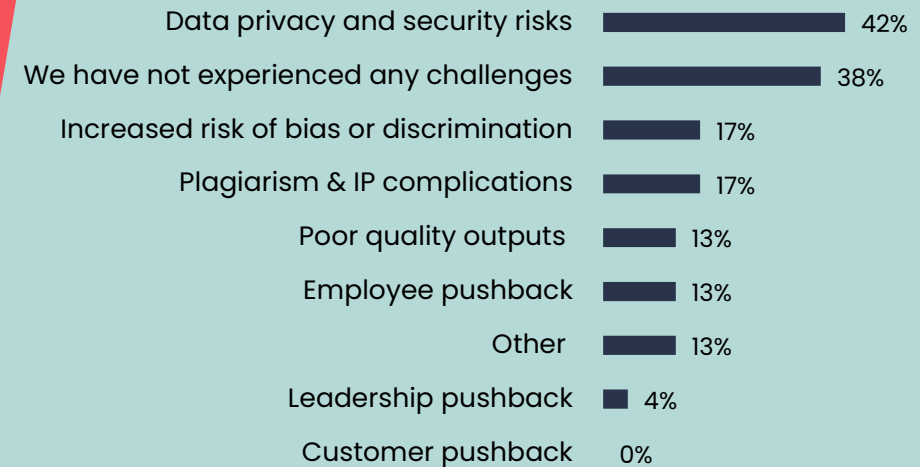
AI Benefits & Challenges

Of the respondents currently using AI in the workplace, nearly all have found it to be beneficial, with only 4% saying they have not experienced any benefits with the technology and 38% saying they have not experienced any challenges. The survey found that the biggest benefit reported is, by far, time savings (92%) followed by improved efficiency (68%).

The biggest challenge reported with using AI is data privacy and security risks. Only 13% of respondents indicated that they have experienced poor quality outputs from AI, further highlighting that the technology has the potential to be extremely useful in a workplace context.

Has the use of AI benefitted your HR function in any of the following ways?* (n=25)

Benefit	%
Time savings	92%
Improved efficiency	68%
Easing heavy workloads	56%
Cost savings	36%
Higher quality work deliverables	28%
Increased employee engagement	8%
We have not experienced benefits	4%
Other	0%

Has the use of AI introduced any of the following challenges for your HR function?* (n=24)

Challenge	%
Data privacy and security risks	42%
We have not experienced any challenges	38%
Increased risk of bias or discrimination	17%
Plagiarism & IP complications	17%
Poor quality outputs	13%
Employee pushback	13%
Other	13%
Leadership pushback	4%
Customer pushback	0%

*Respondents could make multiple selections.

HR PA | Human
Resources
Professionals
Association

Contact the HRPA Team:

communications@hrpa.ca

hrpa.ca