

The great AI regret: Over two-thirds of workers feel nostalgic for pre-AI work and 43% would remove GenAI from the world

70% regularly feel nostalgic for how work operated before AI, with 33% saying they preferred it. 43% would remove GenAI tools from the world entirely.

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, July 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A wave of pre-AI nostalgia is sweeping through the modern workplace, as [new research from digital transformation consultancy Adaptavist](#) reveals that more than two-thirds (70%) of US knowledge workers regularly feel nostalgic for how work operated before generative AI, and 43% say they would remove GenAI tools from the world entirely if they had the chance.

The research, which surveyed 500 knowledge workers across the US (as part of a global survey of 2,500 professionals across the UK, US, Canada, Germany and Spain), found that rather than freeing workers from drudgery, AI has introduced new pressures, eroded the value of skilled work, and left employees feeling less engaged and less valued than before.

A third (33%) of US respondents said they preferred how work operated before GenAI tools were widely adopted, with a further 19% expressing no preference either way. Meanwhile, on a global scale, the desire to turn back the clock is stronger among younger workers: 40% of both Gen Z and Millennials say they would remove GenAI from the world, compared to 32% of Gen X and 29% of Boomers.

The creative and ethical deficit

One of the leading drivers for this 'pre-AI nostalgia' is the creative and ethical trade-off, with many US workers believing their work held more value before the widespread implementation of GenAI:

- Creativity trade-off: 34% of workers who would remove AI would do so because they believe it reduces creativity.
- Ethical concerns: 34% cite concerns over misuse, and 38% worry about surveillance and privacy.
- Meaningless labour: Over half (54%) say that dealing with low-quality 'AI slop' makes their job feel less meaningful and more repetitive, with 43% admitting it has made them less engaged at work overall.

The verification tax

Perhaps the most striking finding is the gap between AI's promise of efficiency and the reality US workers are experiencing day-to-day.

- Verification tax: Half (50%) of workers now spend more time verifying and fact-checking AI output than the time they actually save by using it.
- Productivity drag: 60% say poor-quality AI-generated work is actively slowing down their projects, while 65% believe it is reducing overall team efficiency.
- The 'Slop' effect: The influx of low-quality AI-generated content is damaging morale and making the modern workplace feel more sluggish and harder to navigate than the one workers left behind.

Human vs. Machine

US workers are also grappling with an uncomfortable new reality: being measured against machines.

- 65% feel their performance is now being compared – fairly or not – to AI-generated output.
- 31% say they use AI simply to meet workload demands, and 30% use it just to keep up with colleagues.
- Workers now face intense pressure to improve performance (33%), improve quality (35%), and be more efficient (29%) – simply to keep pace in a machine-accelerated environment.

The problem isn't the technology. It's the implementation.

Despite the frustration, this is not a wholesale rejection of AI. Sentiment toward organizational AI strategies remains broadly positive: 76% of US workers would like their organization to increase AI use, 79% trust that AI is being used ethically, and 78% say their organization has been transparent about its adoption.

Yet more than one in three (39%) often do not understand why they are expected to use AI in their role, and an equal proportion report AI fatigue as a result. The findings suggest that adoption is not the same as engagement, and that the gap between the two is where disillusionment takes root.

Neal Riley, AI Innovation Lead at The Adaptavist Group, commented: "These findings point to an underlying gap we see in most AI implementations. It is much easier for organizations to focus on adoption metrics – who is using AI, how often they are using it – than it is to measure its impact on the work itself.

By understanding the nature of the work and the different value streams across your business, you can more accurately measure outcomes and impact rather than simply counting actions.

When AI is introduced thoughtfully, with the right guardrails and genuine support for the people using it, it can enhance rather than erode what makes work meaningful and impactful."

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Methodology: Research surveyed 2,500 knowledge workers from the UK, US, Canada, Spain, and Germany in March 2026. The research was conducted by Attest.

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Founded in 2005, we're a global provider of transformative solutions and a trusted partner to Atlassian, monday.com, AWS, GitLab and many more. Our expert consultancy aligns strategy, platforms, and people with powerful tailored solutions that redefine how work is delivered and achieve sustained business outcomes.

Experts in cloud, service management, work management, DevOps, agile, and AI, we are the pioneer brand of The Adaptavist Group, a family of companies whose team spans over 1,000 employees, with a 22,000+ customer base representing more than half the Fortune 500. We combine the best talent, technology, and processes to make it easier for our customers to excel-today and tomorrow.

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