

New study: Half of US employees say automation is raising workplace safety expectations - but few feel prepared

More than one in five (22%) who are using new technology have not received training in the past 12 months

FORTH WORTH, TX, UNITED STATES, August 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new study has revealed that half of US employees (50%) say workplace safety expectations have become stricter over the past 12 months as automation becomes embedded across the workplace. Despite this, 22% of those using new technology haven't received training during this time frame.

With that, many employees are struggling to keep up with the pace of change. The research found that more than three-quarters (77%) see AI as a threat to their job, while only one in five (20%) feel confident using AI at work to improve their output.

That's according to a new report by [RS](#), a global product and service solutions provider for industrial customers, which surveyed US manufacturing employees across the nation to better understand how automation, AI and other Industry 4.0 technologies are impacting workplace safety expectations, skills development, and employee confidence.

Overall, 86% of respondents say they are using new technologies; though, a lack of training appears to be contributing to a growing confidence gap, with workers identifying skills shortages across both technical and human capabilities.

Top five skills gaps identified by US employees:

1. AI or machine-assisted tools knowledge - 26%
2. Soft skills, including communication and team leadership - 25%
3. Data analytics and digital literacy - 24%
4. Technical troubleshooting - 23%
5. Safety or compliance skills linked to automation - 21%

The research suggests that the skills gap is not simply a motivation issue. Instead, employees are facing practical barriers to accessing training, with cost, lack of available training, and limited time during work hours among the most common challenges.

Top five biggest barriers to upskilling identified by US employees:

1. Cost of training – 17%
2. Lack of available training – 15%
3. No time during work hours – 14%
4. Training not available in their area or shift – 11%
5. Lack of manager support – 10%

Employee sentiment around AI also remains cautious. While automation and AI are becoming more common in day-to-day work, only 20% say they see AI in the workplace as a “good thing”, compared with data from RS’ [2025 AI in the workplace study research](#), where 25% of employees viewed AI as “good.”

In 2025, 72% of employees said they saw AI as a threat to their job, compared with 77% in the latest research. Confidence has also dipped, with 23% saying they feel confident using AI at work in 2025, compared with 20% in the latest study.

Closing the skills gap will be critical not only for successful technology adoption, but also for maintaining productivity, safety and employee confidence as Industry 4.0 continues to reshape manufacturing roles. Karen Gavenda, Director of Revenue Operations at [RS Americas](#), commented:

“Automation and AI are transforming industries at pace, but our studies show that employees don’t yet feel fully equipped to keep up.

“As roles evolve, businesses need to ensure their employees have access to practical, accessible training embedded in their day-to-day to help them work more safely and spend less time on repetitive tasks so they can focus on higher-value work.

“The organizations that will benefit most from AI are those that empower employees to embrace new tools to amplify human expertise rather than replace it.

“I believe the best AI adoption happens when organizations empower people to experiment responsibly, share what they’ve learned, and scale the ideas that create the greatest impact.”

To find out more about this report, please visit: <https://us.rs-online.com/expert/new-study-reveals-us-workers-face-rising-pressure-as-automation-and-ai-reshape-jobs/>

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