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# Robot revolution: How purposeful AI use is building better businesses

Beyond the breathless  
hyperbole, artificial intelligence  
and automation tools are proving  
to be genuine change-makers  
for many sectors

**SAP** Concur



Businesses distracted by wild headlines about the amazing breakthroughs to come in artificial intelligence may be at risk of missing out on huge benefits already available. New research from [Harvard Business Review](#) suggests the hype around emerging tools such as ChatGPT could see business leaders lose sight of the gains available today from existing AI and automation technologies. “This means real value as long as you eschew false hype,” says the HBR report. The key is to be purposeful with AI deployments and to embrace the positive impacts on offer right now.

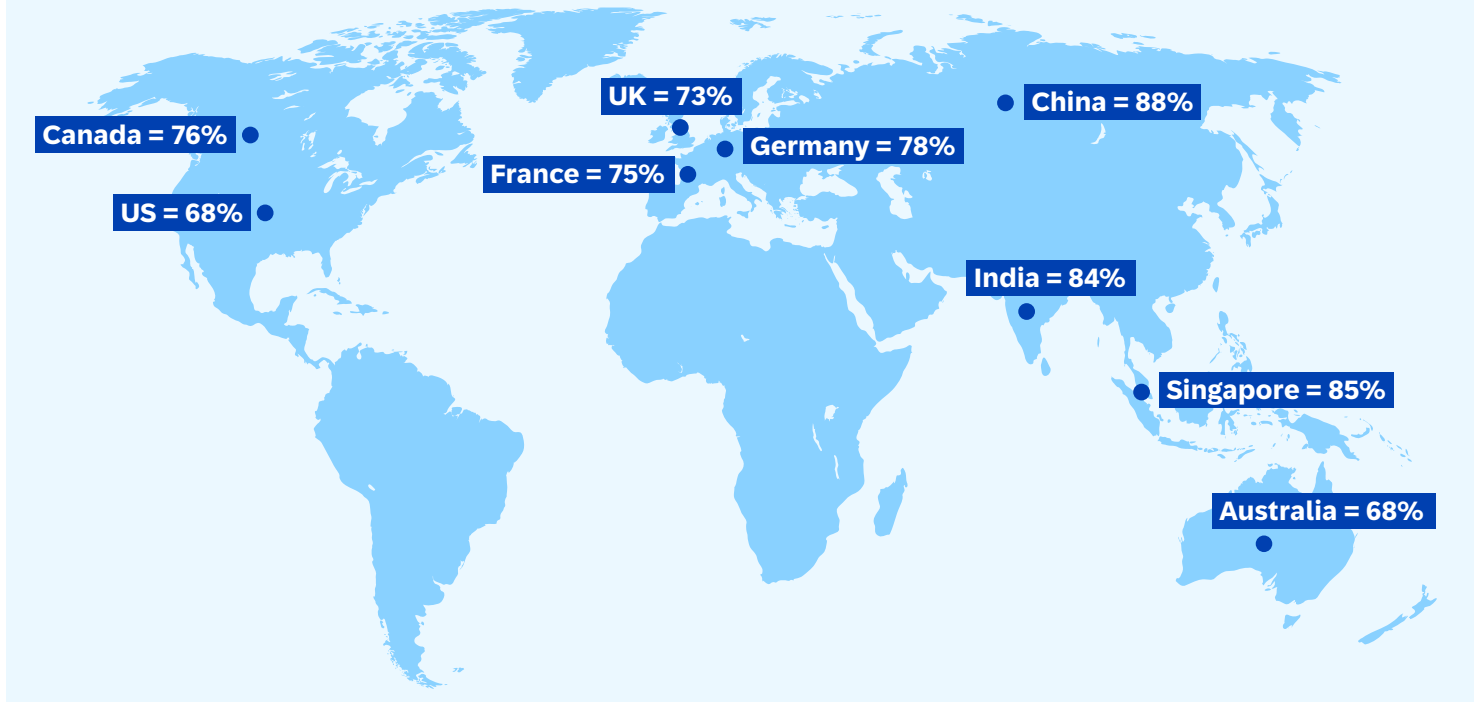
The good news is many businesses are well advanced in deploying the AI tools already available, particularly in functions such as finance. They’re excited by the agility such technology can give them, particularly in an uncertain economic environment, and they see an opportunity to build stronger businesses that work better for all stakeholders, including customers and employees. Recent [SAP Concur research](#) found three-quarters of executives believe the increased use of AI and machine learning can drive greater efficiency and productivity.



## How the world has adopted AI tools<sup>1</sup>

Percentage of businesses that have adopted or are exploring AI

Global average = **76%**



1. IBM

The promise of such technology is that it frees up staff from repetitive manual tasks, enabling them to spend more time on purposeful and value-added pursuits. These include activities that drive strategic growth, but also in areas such as environmental, social, and governance (ESG) priorities.

“The quick win is that humans have limited capacity to process all the information available to us, and AI can do that faster,” says Tomoko Yokoi, a Digital Technology Expert at the Swiss business school IMD. “The biggest gain is speed of decision making, with a reduction of costs as you delegate the process of making that decision to the AI.”

The most data-driven organisations have already embraced that speed. Automation tools enable them to create feedback loops so that they constantly iterate products, services, and their approach to the market. This agility is particularly valuable in the current landscape of ongoing market disruption and volatility. It enables businesses to scale up or down at speed as the landscape changes.

“

Focus on the outcome your business is looking for and then explore the technology solutions that might get you there.”

Tim Lebel, VP and Head of Spend Products at SAP Concur



# How to move forward with AI

How, then, do business leaders move forward with AI and automation? The idea may be daunting, but their competitors will certainly be looking at their options. A [survey](#) conducted by Forbes shows that 56 per cent of businesses are already using AI to improve customer service. Other common use cases include production process improvements, process automation and cyber security.

The key to making progress, says Tim Lebel, VP and Head of Spend Products at SAP Concur, is to think about the end goals for your business rather than starting with the technology. “Focus on the outcome your business is looking for and then explore the technology solutions that might get you there more quickly and cost-effectively,” he says. “That outcome might be an internal business challenge, or it might be something that is customer-facing.”

Many technology experts advocate starting with small projects where a setback would be disappointing rather than disastrous. The idea is to learn on the job as the business moves on to larger deployments. Experimentation can be a good way to proceed, says Tomoko Yokoi. “Digital projects often start as pilot schemes before they go corporate wide,” she says. “Building a centre of excellence that directs and scales these projects can work well.”

One mistake some organisations make is to lean too heavily on the IT department. “There was a time when IT would make every technology decision, but with AI and automation, the adoption process needs to be much more collaborative,” argues Lebel. “Business leaders from multiple functions need to work together to identify business use cases and potential solutions.”

It will also be important to monitor results closely. Companies should be able to help their customers map out the value they can expect from new technologies, with clear metrics to measure progress against that planned trajectory. The key is to hold project leaders and third-party providers accountable – projects that deliver underwhelming returns on investment will undermine confidence in further transformation.



### Employees want more AI in the workplace<sup>2</sup>

**81%**

of employees think AI improves their overall performance at work

**89%**

of employees think AI could help with at least half of their workload

**51%**

of employees think AI can help them achieve a better work-life balance

# Don't be afraid to be curious

Finally, while it's important not to be blown off course by hype over emerging technologies, new advances should not be ignored either. Lebel says: "Generative AI is a technology that is going to accelerate so quickly – possibly more quickly than we want, given some of the ethical and safety considerations." In which case, business leaders need to be curious about what might be possible, and how to manage it.

**"Technology adoption has to be thoughtful."**

Tim Lebel, VP and Head of Spend Products at SAP Concur

Research from KPMG underlines the point. A recent [survey](#) from the consultant found that 65 per cent of business leaders expect generative AI to have a significant impact on their organisation over the next three to five years – but half believe trust in their businesses could be harmed.

Businesses need to proceed with caution, embracing the possibilities of this emerging technology while putting guard-rails in place. "We set up an ethics board in 2022 because we wanted customers to understand that we have their back," says Lebel. The future of AI is exciting, he believes, but technology adoption has to be thoughtful.

3. [IPA](#)



## Transparency matters<sup>3</sup>

Percentage of consumers who agree that:

**74%**

Brands should be transparent in their use of AI-generated content

**75%**

They should be notified when they are not dealing with a real person

**67%**

AI should not pretend to be human or act as if it has a personality



## Learn More

Explore more ways you can have a significant impact on future-proofing your finance function and your entire business.

Check out the eBook [Artificial Intelligence, Real Solutions for Business](#) to learn more.

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