

AI Roundtable: Themes & Trends Report

What Lancaster Businesses Are Saying About AI

Overview

On August 26th, the Lancaster Chamber hosted an AI Roundtable bringing together professionals from a variety of industries and organizational sizes to discuss how they are currently using artificial intelligence, what concerns or unanswered questions they have, and how their organizations are approaching AI policies and guardrails. Each of the table conversations were recorded and transcribed, then analyzed through AI to identify themes and trends that were discussed.

Across the conversations, one thing became clear: businesses are no longer simply asking whether they should use AI. They are trying to determine how to use it effectively, securely, responsibly, and in a way that creates real value.

Question 1: What are you or your company currently doing with AI?

Overall Theme: AI is primarily being used as a productivity and efficiency tool, with businesses moving from simple content generation toward automation, data analysis, knowledge management, and AI-powered agents.

1. Saving time on repetitive work

Drafting emails and documents; writing marketing copy; research; summarizing information; meeting notes; data entry; proposals; presentations; formatting; reports; and repetitive questions.

Why it matters: AI's immediate value is often getting tedious work off an employee's plate.

2. Marketing and communications

Drafting social media and marketing copy; generating campaign ideas; creating promotional materials; editing photos; developing website content; researching audiences and trends; and creating presentations.

Why it matters: AI is being used as a creative partner and starting point rather than a replacement for human creativity.

3. Research and information gathering

Employees are using AI to get to a workable starting point faster.

Why it matters: AI is becoming an information-access tool that can accelerate research and reduce the time needed to get oriented.

4. Analyzing organizational data

Customer, sales, applicant, financial, operational, and other business information can be reviewed and analyzed with AI.

Why it matters: Businesses are beginning to see AI as a way to make existing organizational data more useful and accessible.

5. Internal knowledge management

Searching policies and FAQs; answering HR and IT questions; navigating software; accessing documentation; answering customer questions; and summarizing internal information.

Why it matters: AI is increasingly becoming an interface for organizational knowledge.

6. AI agents

Pulling information from multiple systems; reviewing calendars and emails; generating summaries; monitoring errors; analyzing logs; assisting with sales; answering questions; and supporting customers.

Why it matters: The progression is moving from using AI, to automating tasks, to connecting AI with organizational information, to building agents.

7. Software development and technical work

Coding, troubleshooting, software development, code generation, and other technical work.

Why it matters: AI can accelerate technical work, but it does not eliminate the need for technical expertise.

8. Meetings and knowledge capture

Transcribing meetings, creating summaries, identifying action items, capturing information, and creating follow-up reminders.

Why it matters: AI is becoming a tool for organizational memory.

9. Customer service

FAQs, customer chat, voice assistants, website knowledge bases, basic troubleshooting, customer research, and reviewing previous customer interactions.

Why it matters: Businesses are exploring how AI can improve customer service without eliminating the human relationship.

10. Brainstorming and idea generation

Marketing, product, menu and drink concepts, campaigns, presentations, business strategies, content, and solutions to problems.

Why it matters: AI is increasingly being used as a brainstorming partner that helps people reach a workable idea faster.

AI Tools Being Used by Businesses Now

- **ChatGPT** — A flexible general-purpose tool for drafting, research, brainstorming, summarizing, and everyday productivity tasks.
- **Claude** — A general-purpose AI option businesses are experimenting with for writing, analysis, research, and working with information.
- **Gemini** — A general-purpose AI tool businesses are exploring for research, content creation, analysis, and productivity.
- **Copilot** — An AI option businesses are using within workplace productivity workflows, particularly for common administrative and content tasks.
- **Salesforce AI** — An enterprise-oriented option for organizations looking to bring AI into customer and sales workflows.
- **Glean** — An internal knowledge-focused tool that can help employees find and work with information across organizational content.
- **Custom-built systems** — Organizations with more advanced needs are building AI systems tailored to their specific workflows, data, and use cases.
- **Specialized industry tools** — Businesses are also using AI capabilities designed for specific industries or professional functions.

Question 2: What reservations do you have? What are you still trying to figure out?

Overall Theme: Concerns center on risk and responsible implementation, particularly security and privacy, accuracy, human oversight, employee education, quality, ROI, authenticity, bias, and AI's limitations.

Security and data privacy

What employees can enter into AI, where information goes, who has access, how confidential information is protected, and what happens when employees use personal AI accounts.

Accuracy and trust

Participants raised concerns about incorrect tax, research, business, and technical information. AI should be treated as a tool—not a source of truth—and human verification remains essential.

Speed versus quality

Businesses are weighing productivity gains against quality, understanding, and professional judgment, especially in coding, financial work, research, and complex decisions.

AI training and literacy

Employees need guidance on prompting, evaluating outputs, data-sharing boundaries, appropriate use, recognizing errors, and avoiding overdependence.

Cost and ROI

Organizations are asking what they should spend, whether paid versions are necessary, what AI features they already have, and how to measure productivity gains and return on investment.

Overreliance and loss of expertise

Businesses want the benefits of AI without losing human expertise, institutional knowledge, or critical thinking.

Jobs and hiring

Organizations are considering how AI could affect positions, hiring practices, automation, and the skills employers prioritize.

Bias and discrimination

Participants recognize that AI can introduce bias, particularly when historical data reflects characteristics such as age, disability, or language.

Authenticity and creativity

Businesses want AI efficiency without losing originality, genuine brand voice, or appropriate human involvement.

AI limitations

AI remains less reliable for complex business-specific problems, nuanced situations, advanced technical work, process optimization, truly novel ideas, and emotional customer interactions.

Question 3: Does your company have an AI policy? Is it working?

Overall Theme: Organizations are at very different stages of AI governance. Some have formal policies, approved platforms, security controls, AI committees, dedicated leadership, and training; others are still experimenting without formal guidance.

AI policies are new and evolving

Businesses do not see an AI policy as something they write once and forget.

Many businesses do not have a formal policy yet

Some organizations are still in the “figure it out first, formalize it later” stage.

AI maturity varies significantly

Organizations range from independent experimentation to enterprise AI, dedicated AI leadership, closed systems, and formal governance.

The goal is generally responsible use, not banning AI

The emerging approach is to establish guardrails that enable appropriate use.

Standardization remains unresolved

Organizations are considering approved platforms, free versus paid versions, departmental flexibility, and how to keep company information within approved systems.

Technical guardrails can complement policy

Access controls, defined purposes, information silos, and systems that refuse inappropriate requests can help prevent misuse.

Shadow AI is a governance challenge

Personal accounts and employees uploading company information outside approved systems can make AI use difficult to govern.

Work and personal AI accounts need clear boundaries

AI creates a new need to distinguish professional and personal technology use.

AI memory creates privacy questions

Personalization can conflict with privacy when AI retains information about users, their work, preferences, and previous conversations.

Brand guidelines are becoming part of AI governance

Policies increasingly address tone, brand voice, writing preferences, language, and organizational style.

Policies are a starting point

Businesses recognize that waiting for a perfect policy may leave employees without useful guidance.

Cross-Cutting Themes

AI is moving from experimentation to implementation

Businesses are progressing from trying individual tools toward integrating AI into systems and workflows.

Productivity is the strongest perceived benefit

The clearest value is saving time through automation, research, first drafts, summaries, and repetitive administrative work.

Security is the biggest barrier to broader adoption

Businesses want to expand AI use while protecting organizational information.

Human judgment remains essential

AI can help people do more, but review, verification, expertise, creativity, and judgment remain critical.

AI literacy is becoming a workforce skill

Employees need to understand prompting, output evaluation, data-sharing boundaries, appropriate use, and error recognition.

Policies must evolve with the technology

The emerging approach is Policy → Test → Learn → Update → Repeat.

The future of work is part of the AI conversation

AI is influencing discussions about hiring, skills, training, job design, institutional knowledge, and customer expectations.

Businesses want practical guidance

Participants are looking for actionable guidance on tools, security, policies, training, ROI, use cases, brand voice, and implementation.

Key Takeaway

The AI conversation among Lancaster businesses is moving beyond “Should we be using AI?” toward “How do we use AI effectively, securely, responsibly, and in a way that actually improves our business?” The strongest perceived benefit is productivity and time savings, while security and data privacy remain the strongest concern. Businesses are also navigating accuracy, human oversight, employee training, quality control, ROI, workforce impacts, and evolving governance.

The central theme: Businesses don't necessarily need more information about what AI can do. They need practical guidance on how to implement it well.