

Understanding business leaders' attention to GenAI

From hype to value creation

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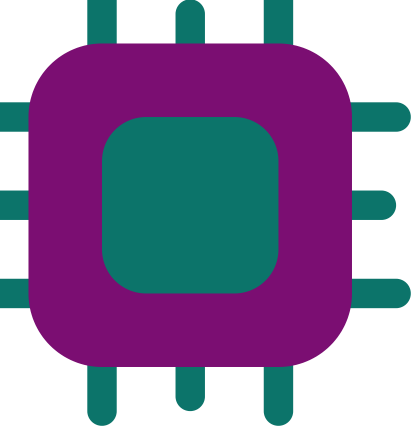
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Our research finds that UK businesses are currently driven by competitive pressure – or the fear of falling behind – when it comes to implementing generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). We discuss how to move away from this ‘hype’ motivation, to a more informed understanding of the potential value and impact of GenAI to drive adoption of the technology, providing recommendations for policymakers and businesses.

Public Management and Regulation Group

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Whether it's creating marketing content, curating more personalised customer experiences, analysing data or boosting efficiency, GenAI is a revolutionary technology that can transform how all businesses operate. Some sectors, including agriculture, construction, creative industries and transport, have high potential for exploiting GenAI's capabilities, but currently have low rates of adoption. **In this brief, we share insights from new research to understand what drives UK business leaders' attention to GenAI, and outline the implications of our findings.**

Research overview

- We surveyed IT managers at more than 700 UK firms across sectors to explore the attitudes of their leadership towards GenAI.
- We collected 419 responses from YouGov's panel of [IT decision makers](#) and 294 additional responses from the Prolific UK platform.
- We asked respondents to assess their leaders' actions on:
 - Communicating the strategic potential of GenAI
 - Identifying the necessary skills to use GenAI
 - Establishing AI initiatives like working groups, pilot projects and training



Key recommendations for policymakers

1

Tailor current industry-level programmes to provide sector-specific support targeting low-adoption, high-benefit industries, and providing more support in regions outside London

2

Develop use case studies that show the practical benefits and impacts of GenAI and address responsible AI use, including challenges around effective and responsible use of data

3

Invest in government-funded upskilling, especially targeting small to medium businesses who face greater resource constraints and have lower confidence in AI implementation



Key recommendations for business leaders

1

Be clear about the benefits of AI: move from competition-driven adoption of GenAI to strategic implementation based on clear business cases and business readiness

2

Focus on data readiness: ensure robust data quality, governance and literacy programmes are in place before scaling AI applications, particularly for medium and large organisations

3

Invest in your workforce: prioritise training to ensure your workforce develop the skills needed to use GenAI responsibly, confidently and flexibly

Our research found that **respondents were moderately positive about their organisation’s progress with GenAI**. Challenges include upskilling, responsible AI use, resource constraints and developing use cases. We also found significant variation by business size and region.



Motivation: moving beyond the fear factor

In the early stages of implementing GenAI, we found that business leaders’ attention is mainly driven by the fear of falling behind others in their sector. While competitive pressure can be a productive force, clearer expectations of business benefit and how to develop internal readiness are more likely to result in meaningful adoption and real value creation from GenAI.



Geographic disparities

Pressures from peers are much higher in London-based businesses, driving the attention of leadership to GenAI. London-based businesses also demonstrate much higher confidence in data literacy, relevant training and the quality of their data.



SMEs vs larger firms

We found key differences between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large businesses in their attitudes to GenAI.

SMEs	Large businesses
Less confident about using GenAI in their organisation and communicating potential benefits	More confident about potential benefits of GenAI, such as productivity, efficiency and reduced costs
Available resources more likely to explain what drives leaders’ attention to GenAI	Competitive pressures from the environment are even more important in shaping leaders’ attention to GenAI

Addressing data inequalities in the UK

Our analysis has produced findings that are highly relevant to business leaders and policymakers looking to implement GenAI and exploit its potential for UK business. In particular, our findings underline both regional and business size differences that are amplified by known data inequalities in the UK’s workforce. To address this, business leaders and policymakers should:

- Develop clear use cases for different application of GenAI
- Invest in training and upskilling to ensure data readiness and responsible AI use
- Target support and strategic government investment to address resource constraints





By explaining leadership attention instead of directly measuring adoption, our research helps understand the role of hype in the early stages of business use of GenAI. Industry-level organising initiatives like [Bridge AI](#) and [techUK AI Hub](#) can alleviate peer pressure to support more informed investment decisions.”

– Dr Panos Panagiotopoulos

Underpinning research

Skills Policy Awards 2023/2024. Organisational Data Readiness project report.
Panos Panagiotopoulos and Muhammad Afzal (forthcoming).



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With a law degree and MSc in Artificial Intelligence and Data Science, Professor Sue Turner is dedicated to inspiring people to use AI with wisdom and integrity. In addition to her work at University of Bristol, she advises businesses through her consultancy, AI Governance Limited. She has been rated in the World's Top 100 Women in AI Ethics and was awarded the OBE in 2021 for Services to Social Justice.



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