Skills Crisis Intensifies as AI Reshapes Workplace

November 4, 2025

New research shows upskilling investments help employees adapt and thrive, while boosting employer competitiveness

NEWTON, Mass.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Nov. 4, 2025-- Artificial intelligence is rewriting the rules of work, and American employees are struggling to keep up. According to the fifth annual Education Index, commissioned by EdAssist by Bright Horizons (NYSE:BFAM) and conducted by The Harris Poll, the urgency is unmistakable. As AI continues to reshape the workplace, 42% of employees now expect their roles will evolve significantly within the next year. This shift is driving a strong demand for new skills and motivating employees to upskill, with 32% of employees feeling increased pressure to learn workplace skills because of AI, up from 26% last year.

Employees are being asked to do more, deliver work faster, and adapt to new technologies at breakneck speed. The result is mounting stress, shifting priorities, and a workforce actively seeking practical pathways to upskill and reskill to stay relevant and advance. Yet the real story isn't AI itself, but the skills mandate AI has ignited, prompting employees and employers alike to rethink what it takes to thrive in a changing workplace.

At the same time, the day-to-day demands of work are intensifying: 81% feel pressure to take on a greater workload, and 80% say they feel pressure to deliver results faster than ever. Similar proportions (79%) also feel pressure to keep up with new technologies. The pressure leaves employees looking to their employers for real support and practical solutions.

"Employers face a pivotal moment in workforce strategy as AI fundamentally transforms the nature of work, and employees are demanding meaningful investment in their growth and adaptability from their organizations," said Diane Bartoli, Senior Vice President, EdAssist by Bright Horizons. "Those who prioritize accessible, skills-focused learning and address financial barriers will not only retain top talent but also build a resilient workforce ready to meet the demands of a rapidly changing economy."

Financial Barriers and the Shift to Short-Term Learning

While employees are eager to upskill, the price tag is still a major roadblock. Nearly half (48%) of workers say knowing they would incur student loan debt has stopped them from pursuing additional education, and 34% say inability to afford to take on student loan debt for additional education is blocking career advancement. Among those with student loan debt, 77% call it a "huge burden," and 63% say the education they received hasn't been worth the impact student loan debt has had on their overall wellbeing.

Perhaps as a result, employees are shifting to faster, more affordable learning. The good news is that employees are ready – and access to upskilling is driving loyalty:

- 79% are interested in developing new skills or pursuing additional education (up from 74% last year)
- 76% have completed some form of additional education, most commonly short-term, stackable options that likely fit work and life without adding crushing debt.
- 85% would be more loyal to an employer that invests in continuing education, and 74% say they'd be more loyal to an employer that helped contribute toward paying off student loans.

Skills Pressure, AI Adoption, and the Training Gap

The data shows that employees are feeling the squeeze from all sides. Nearly eight in ten (79%) report pressure to keep learning new skills, and a third (34%) admit they feel unprepared for the changes AI may bring to their job. Despite this uncertainty, AI adoption in the workplace remains limited—only 50% of employees have ever used AI at work, and just 17% use it frequently, most often for lighter tasks like communication and writing support (57%), data analysis (51%), and brainstorming (50%) – not for deeper productivity or workflow tasks.

"The missing link is employer support, adds Bartoli. "As AI transforms the workplace, organizations must proactively address the upskilling needs of their workforce, both through formal AI training and by providing access to a range of learning options, including new certifications, degrees and targeted training programs. Employers who invest in these pathways enable employees to grow, adapt and succeed, while building a more resilient and competitive workforce."

When organizations provide formal AI training, adoption jumps to 76% (compared to just 25% without training), and employees feel significantly more prepared for the changes AI may bring to their job (84% vs. 48%). Among those who use AI:

- 86% of employees who use AI say it makes their job easier
- Yet, 42% of employees overall say their employer expects them to learn how to use AI on their own, and 50% report no employer-provided AI training at all.

- 58% wish their employer trained them on how to use AI in their day-to-day work, and 77% would be likely to participate if it were offered for free, showing a strong appetite for support.

To download the full fifth annual Bright Horizons Education Index report, click here.

About the EdAssist by Bright Horizons Education Index

The research was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of Bright Horizons among 2,017 US full-time/part-time employed adults aged 18+. The survey was conducted from July 31st – August 14th, 2025.

Data are weighted where necessary by age by gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, employment, household income, and smoking status to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within ± 3.2 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

About EdAssist by Bright Horizons

Bright Horizons EdAssist Solutions® is a leading provider of workforce education solutions, reaching more than seven million adult learners through partnerships with more than 200 of the world's largest employers to deliver high-quality, affordable education programs designed to recruit, retain, and grow talent. In collaboration with over 200 post-secondary institutions in the U.S., EdAssist designs strategic education benefits programs that help build a talent pipeline for in-demand roles, fill skill gaps, and help companies develop the workforce necessary to innovate, grow, and compete in the global economy.

About Bright Horizons Family Solutions Inc.

Bright Horizons® is a leading global provider of high-quality early education and child care, back-up care, and workforce education services. For more than 35 years, we have partnered with employers to support workforces by providing services that help working families and employees thrive personally and professionally. Bright Horizons operates more than 1,000 early education and child care centers in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia and India, and serves more than 1,450 of the world's leading employers. Bright Horizons' early education and child care centers, back-up child and elder care, and workforce education programs help employees succeed at each life and career stage. For more information, go to www.brighthorizons.com.

View source version on businesswire.com: https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20251104672430/en/

Taylor Gallagher, Senior PR Manager
taylor.gallagher@brighthorizons.com

Source: Bright Horizons Family Solutions Inc.