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AI Ethics & Corporate *Responsibility*

A Survey of Business Leaders' Perspectives in the Generative AI Era

Introduction

In an era marked by transformative technological advancements, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into business operations has become an imperative. As AI's capabilities evolve, so do the ethical considerations that accompany its widespread adoption.

Conversica's 2023 AI Ethics and Corporate Responsibility Survey report delves into the findings of a comprehensive survey of **500 US-based business owners, C-suite executives and senior leadership** on their views on AI ethics and corporate responsibility.

A resounding message emerges from the survey: a majority of respondents recognize the paramount importance of well-defined guidelines for the responsible use of AI within companies, especially those that have already embraced the technology. **86% of those already adopting AI said that such guidelines are indispensable** for both businesses and their leaders, compared to 73% of the general group.

One explanation for the gap in prioritization is that those already employing AI have seen firsthand the challenges arising from implementation, increasing their recognition of the urgency of policy creation. However, this alignment with the principle does not necessarily equate to implementation, as many companies have yet to formalize their policies.

- **Only 6%** of respondents have established clear guidelines for the ethical use of AI in their organization.
- Of those planning to adopt AI in the 12 months, that number drops to **one in 20 with guidelines in place** ahead of their adoption.
- **One in five leaders** at companies currently utilizing AI admitted to having **limited or no knowledge** about their organization's AI-related policies.
- **36% are only "somewhat familiar"** with the topic.

While governments around the world are still considering AI-specific regulations, some organizations are proactively adopting diverse measures to ensure AI's responsible deployment. However, the gap between those implementing their own policies and those yet to do so remains wide. Our findings indicate that early policy establishment is becoming a necessity, aligning with the accelerating pace of AI's integration into various sectors.

This survey underscores the importance of **proactive AI ethics and corporate responsibility**. With AI's rapid proliferation, business leaders must strive to bridge the gap and implement robust guidelines. As AI continues to reshape industries, it's crucial that businesses safeguard their operations, brand reputation and, above all, the well-being of end users. This report serves as a timely wake-up call for businesses to acknowledge the evolving AI landscape, and to navigate it ethically and responsibly.
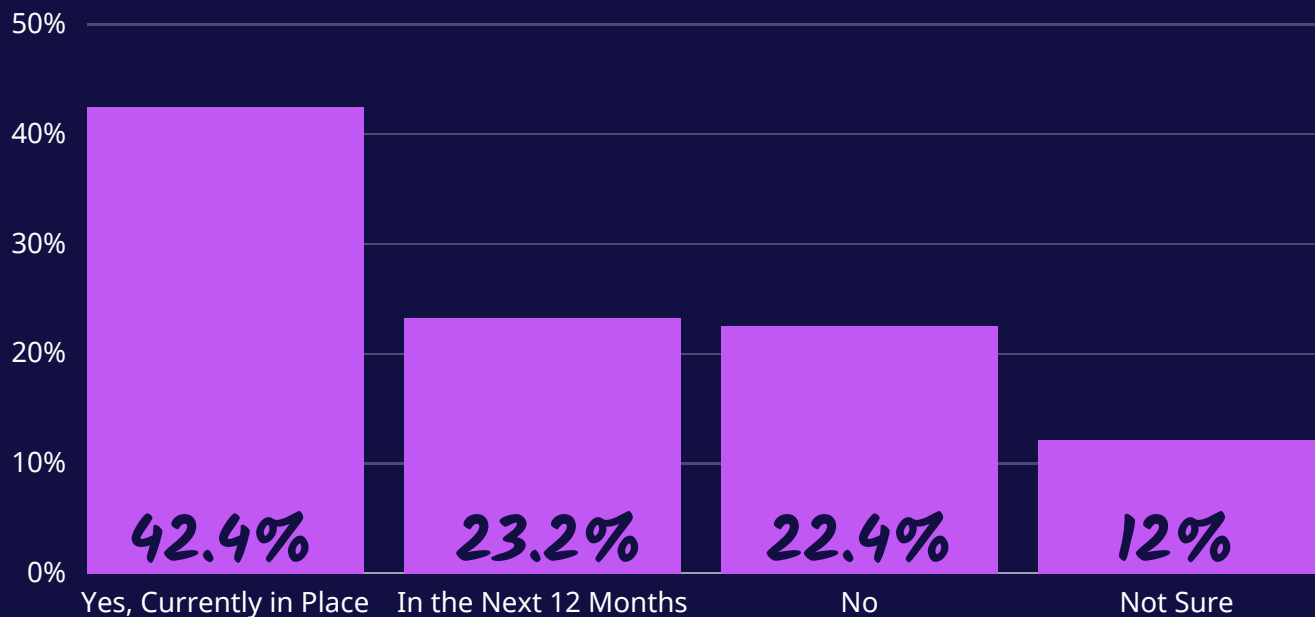
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The State of AI
Adoption

Most companies either have already adopted or are planning to adopt AI-powered services in the next 12 months

Has your company adopted or considered adopting AI-powered services?

42.4%	Yes, Currently in Place
23.2%	In the Next 12 Months
22.4%	No
12%	Not Sure

The largest group of respondents—42%—said that their company has AI-powered services. When combined with those who don't currently have those services in place but are planning to (23%), we can estimate that **within a year, 65% of companies may have AI-powered services in place**.
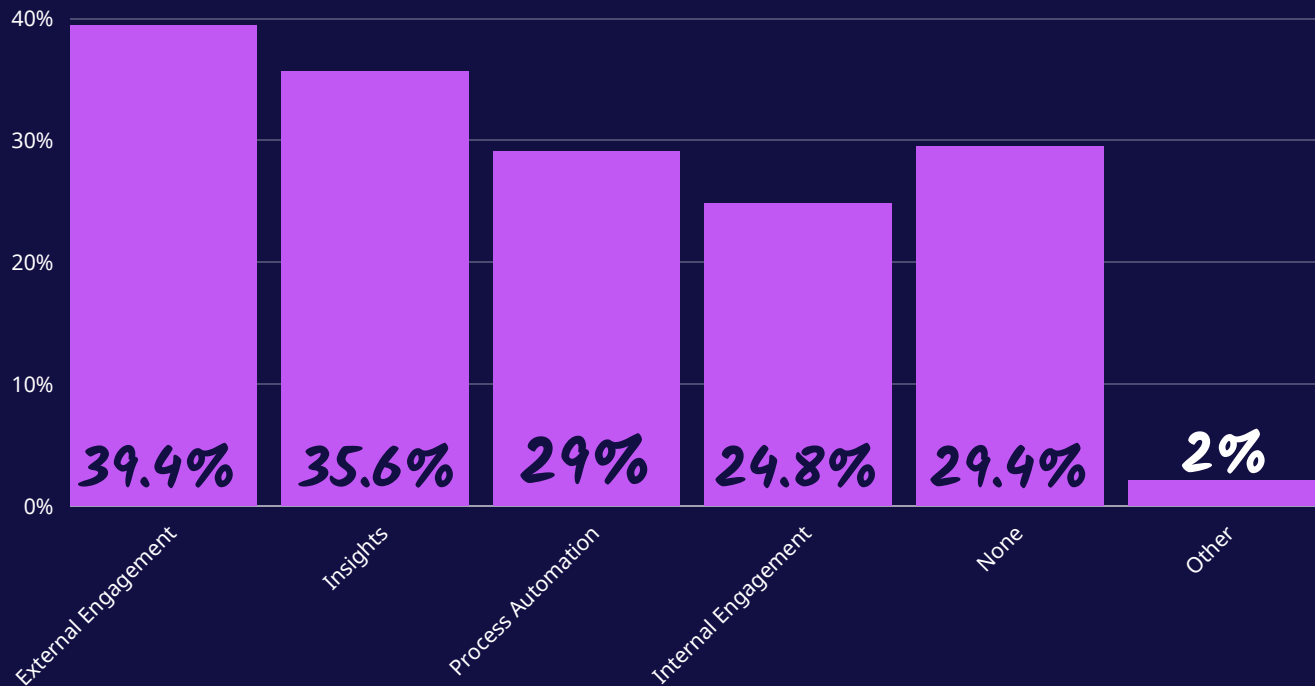
As additional insights from this survey show, the group of respondents that has AI-powered services in place generally expresses views that differ notably from respondents whose companies have not adopted AI-powered services. This includes expressing **greater concern** about the accuracy of data models, data transparency, and false information.

Additionally, this group was **more likely to recognize the importance of clearly established guidelines** for the ethical use of AI, while also favoring slightly different use cases for AI.

The State of AI
Adoption

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Which of the following AI use cases is your company either currently leveraging or likely to adopt in the next 12 months? (Select all that apply)

Category	Value
External Engagement	39.4%
Insights	35.6%
Process Automation	29%
Internal Engagement	24.8%
None	29.4%
Other	2%

When asked about existing or planned use cases for AI, the most frequently cited scenario (selected by 39% of respondents) involved 'external engagement,' i.e., customer service/support, and marketing/sales outreach. Coming in at a close second (36%), people cited 'insights', described as fraud detection, data analytics, and predictive modeling.

However, for respondents whose companies have already adopted AI, **'insights' was the top planned use case**, cited by 58%. This group also cited 'external engagement' with significantly more frequency than the general group of respondents (53% vs. 39%), indicating that this is also a high priority at companies that are already using AI.
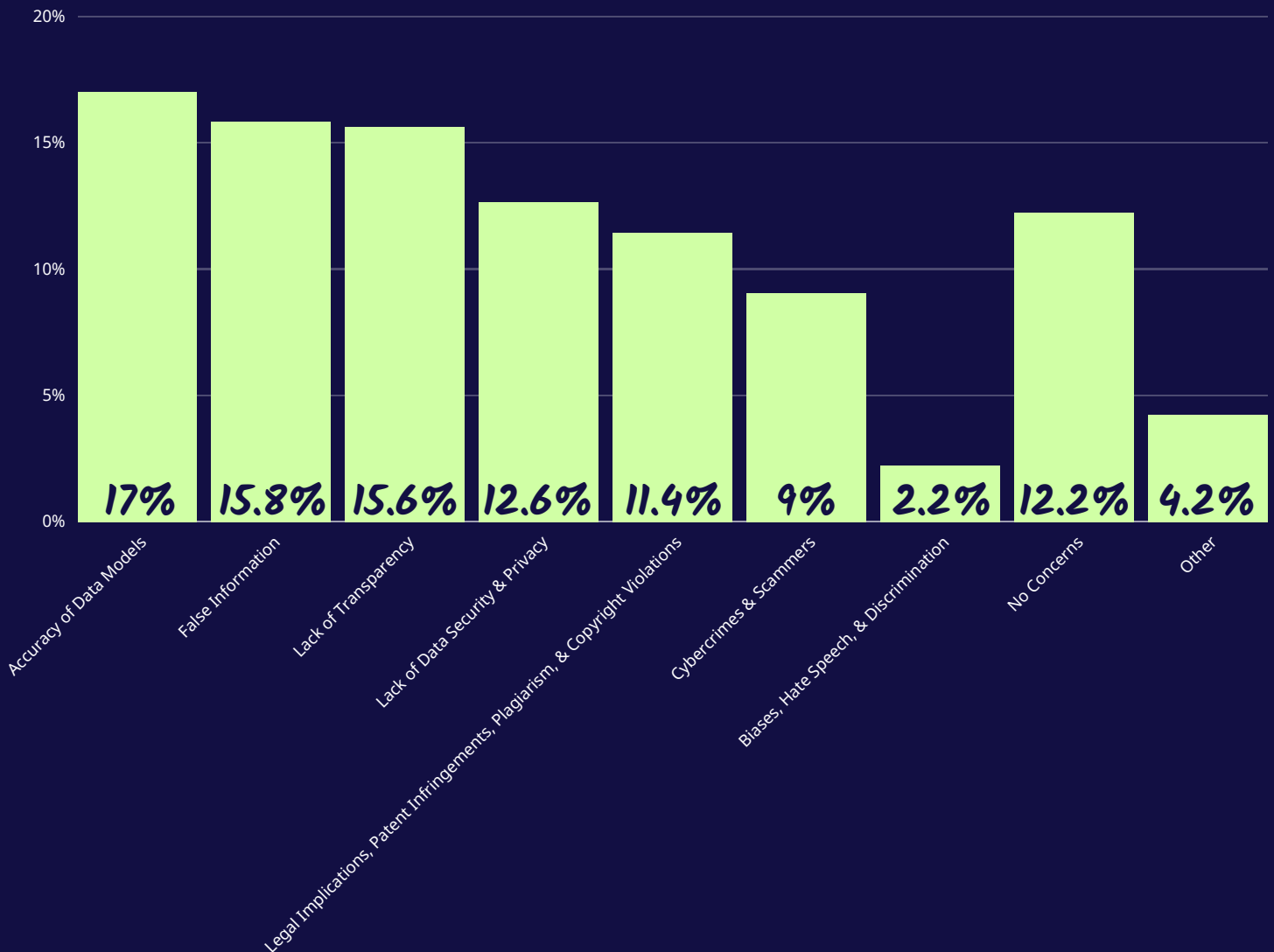
The popularity of external-facing use cases adds an **additional layer of urgency** to how companies are approaching the ethical adoption of AI—when interaction with the outside world is on the table, having safeguards in place is vital, both for the company's protection and for the greater public good.

Business Leaders' Top
Concerns

The accuracy of current data models is the biggest concern for the overall group, but false information tops the list for AI users

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Which is your biggest concern with regard to the use of AI by your company?

Category	Value
Accuracy of Data Models	17%
False Information	15.8%
Lack of Transparency	15.6%
Lack of Data Security & Privacy	12.6%
Legal Implications, Patent Infringements, Plagiarism, & Copyright Violations	11.4%
Cybercrimes & Scammers	9%
Biases, Hate Speech, & Discrimination	2.2%
No Concerns	12.2%
Other	4.2%

Business Leaders' Top *Concerns*

Surprisingly, leaders with no plans to adopt AI are the most likely to report having no concerns

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When presented with an assortment of potential problems associated with AI, respondents most frequently selected **'accuracy of current-day data models' (17%)**.

However, concern was **close to evenly spread** across the assortment of potential ills, with 'false information' (16%) and 'lack of transparency' (16%) garnering a nearly equal share of concern, within the margin of error compared to the top pick.

Interestingly, many of these figures were **higher for respondents from companies that already have AI-powered services in place**. For example, 21% in this group (vs. 17% of the larger group of participants) cited concern over false information, and 20% (vs. 16%) were concerned about the accuracy of data models. Notably, 22% of those with AI services in place were concerned about 'lack of transparency' compared to only 16% of the general group.

For respondents whose companies had **no plans to adopt AI-powered services in the next year**, the top concern (cited by 11% of this group of respondents) was 'legal implications, patent infringements, plagiarism, and copyright violations.'
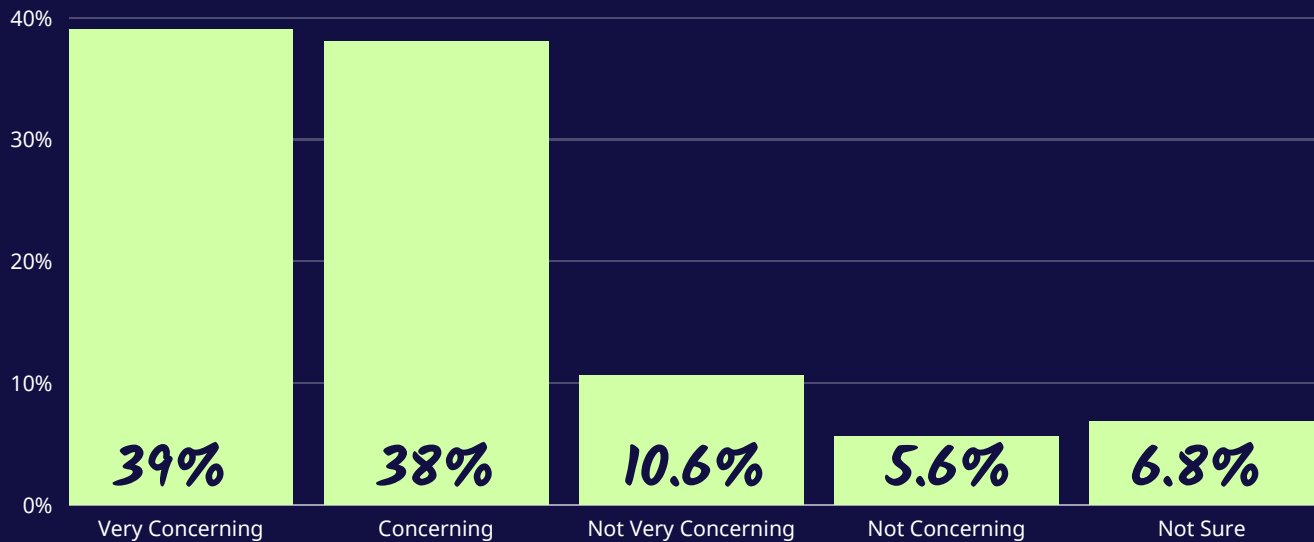
However, it was somewhat puzzling to see that this group was much **more likely to say that they don't have any concerns (29%)** with AI than to cite any particular concern.

While this was not explored in the survey, possible explanations for this may include apathy toward AI or a lack of conviction that AI provides value. For these companies, AI may merely represent another tool in a growing list of business technologies that may or may not prove useful.

Business Leaders' Top *Concerns*

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To what extent do you view false information generated by AI as a significant concern for your company?

39%	**38%**	**10.6%**	**5.6%**	**6.8%**
Very Concerning	Concerning	Not Very Concerning	Not Concerning	Not Sure

Given the proliferation of generative AI tools in recent months and the upcoming presidential election in the US, the survey took a closer look at respondents' attitudes toward false information in particular.

When asked to what extent they viewed false information generated by AI as a significant concern for their company, **77% of total respondents** rated this as either 'Concerning' or 'Very concerning'. This figure was more than **10 points higher**—88%—for respondents whose companies already have AI-powered solutions in place.
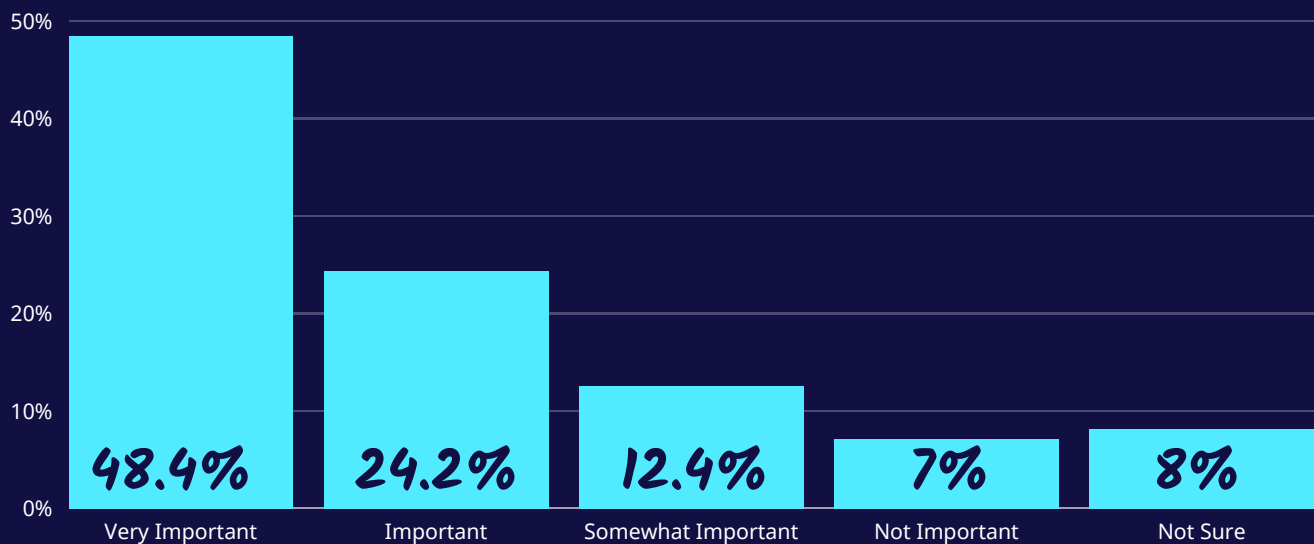
By contrast, only **17% of the general group** of respondents said they were not concerned about this issue.

Proactive
Guidelines & Policies

Nearly 3/4 say guidelines are important, but less than 6% have AI ethics policies in place

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How important is it for your company to have clear established guidelines regarding the ethical & responsible use of AI?

Category	Percentage
Very Important	48.4%
Important	24.2%
Somewhat Important	12.4%
Not Important	7%
Not Sure	8%

The majority of respondents—regardless of whether their companies already have AI in place—appear to **recognize the importance of guidelines** to deal with AI in ethical and responsible ways. 73% say that having clear, established guidelines for the ethical use of AI is either 'very important' (49%) or 'important' (24%).
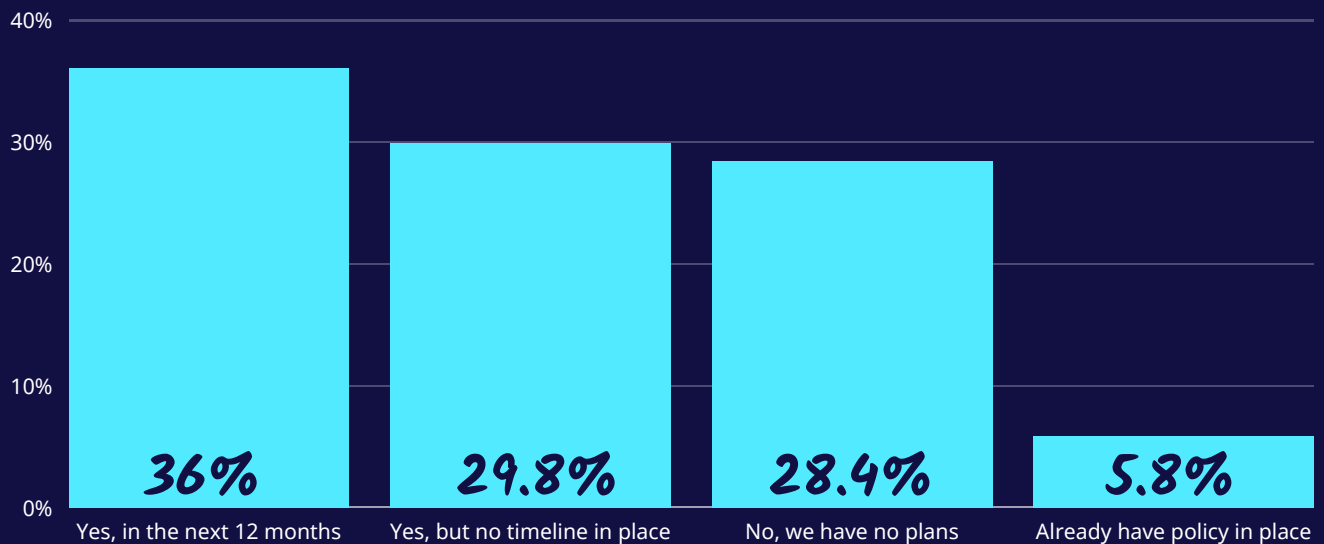
This figure is notably higher for respondents whose companies have already adopted AI-powered services, with **86%** citing it as 'important' or 'very important.'

One possible explanation for this gap is that leaders at companies who are already using AI are more informed about the possible pitfalls—either through research or first-hand experience.

Proactive
Guidelines & Policies

Is your company planning to enact rules or guidelines regarding the ethical and responsible use of AI?

36%	**29.8%**	**28.4%**	**5.8%**
Yes, in the next 12 months	Yes, but no timeline in place	No, we have no plans	Already have policy in place

Despite the fact that most respondents believe that it is important to have clearly established guidelines for the ethical and responsible use of AI, **only one-third of respondents whose companies plan to adopt AI in the next 12 months have specific plans to enact such guidelines on the same timeline**. Rather, for this group, plans were more vague, with 50% saying that their companies were planning to enact guidelines but had no specific timeline.

To be clear, this is not because they already have such policies in place. In fact, **only 5%** of respondents in this group say that their companies already have guidelines in place. This may, therefore, represent a potentially problematic trend on the part of companies to **not start planning for enforcing responsible/ethical use of AI until they are actually using AI technologies.**

There are many potential pitfalls with this approach. One of the most alarming is the **missed opportunity** for close examination of vendor guardrails and compliance. If companies wait until after adoption to enact policies, they will have to work within the capabilities of whatever tool or solution they have purchased.

A proactive approach to creating guidelines ensures that decision-makers can ask the right questions when evaluating AI vendors.

Proactive
Guidelines & Policies

How familiar are you with the security measures, transparency guidelines and ethical parameters offered by the AI providers your company works with?

28.4%	27.4%	14.6%	13.4%	16.2%
Very Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Somewhat Unfamiliar	Very Familiar	NA
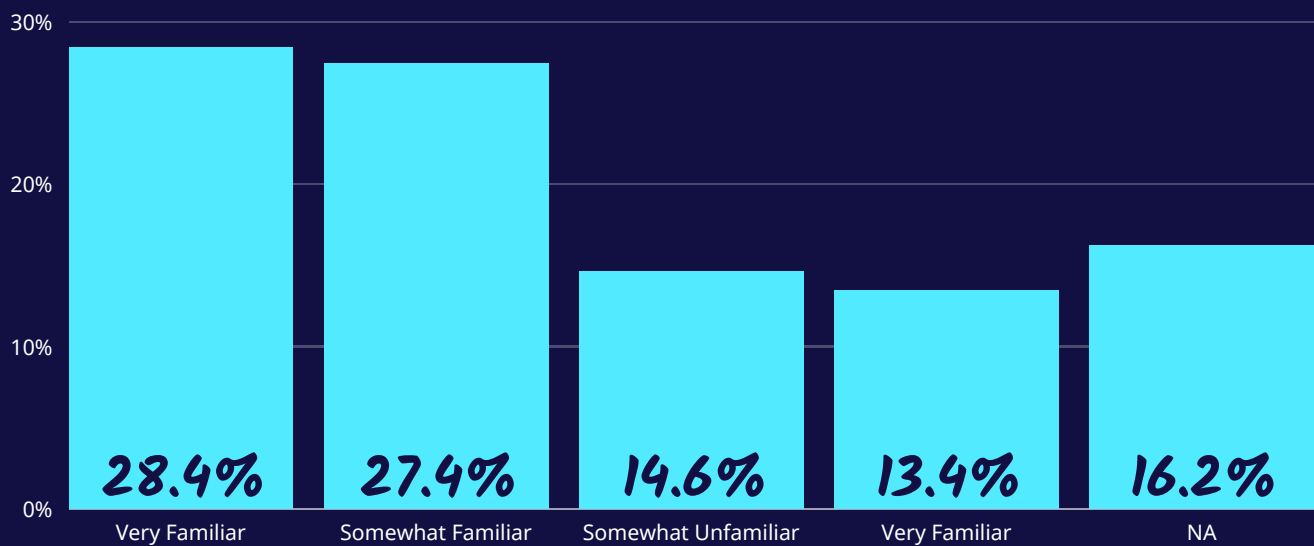
This concern with awareness of vendor security measures, transparency guidelines and ethical parameters bears out in the survey data, with **more than one in five respondents from companies currently using AI reporting that they are somewhat or very unfamiliar** with the safety measures offered by the AI providers they work with (22%).
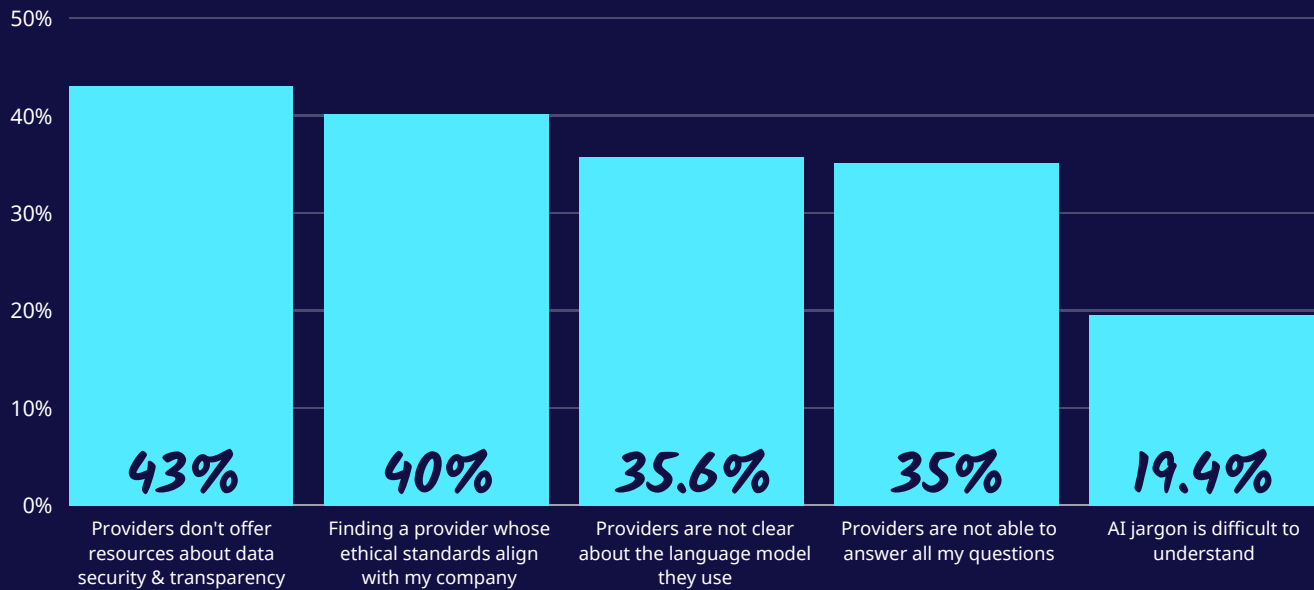
Furthermore, among that group already leveraging AI, **36% report being 'somewhat familiar' with these measures**. Considering what's at stake, companies should consider whether 'somewhat familiar' is an acceptable mark for leaders in their organization.

Business leaders should make it a priority to become **very familiar** with the available security measures and ethical parameters offered by vendors **before** they agree to contract with them.

Proactive
Guidelines & Policies

What do you consider to be the most challenging aspect of making informed decisions on AI adoption in your company? (Select all that apply)

	43%	40%	35.6%	35%	19.4%
	Providers don't offer resources about data security & transparency	Finding a provider whose ethical standards align with my company	Providers are not clear about the language model they use	Providers are not able to answer all my questions	AI jargon is difficult to understand

A potential explanation for the lack of familiarity with vendor ethics standards is AI providers' **failure to make content and resources detailing their security measures more freely available**.

When asked about the most challenging aspect of making informed decisions regarding AI in their companies, the top concerns were lack of resources about data security and transparency (selected by 43% of respondents), and difficulty with finding a provider with ethical standards aligned with those of the company (selected by 40% of respondents).

By contrast, **only 19% were concerned about the difficulty of understanding AI-related jargon**, possibly indicating a growing familiarity with AI-related topics. Interestingly, this number is nearly cut in half—10%—for respondents whose organizations have already adopted AI, indicating that the leaders of those companies may have greater fluency in AI-related concepts and terminology.
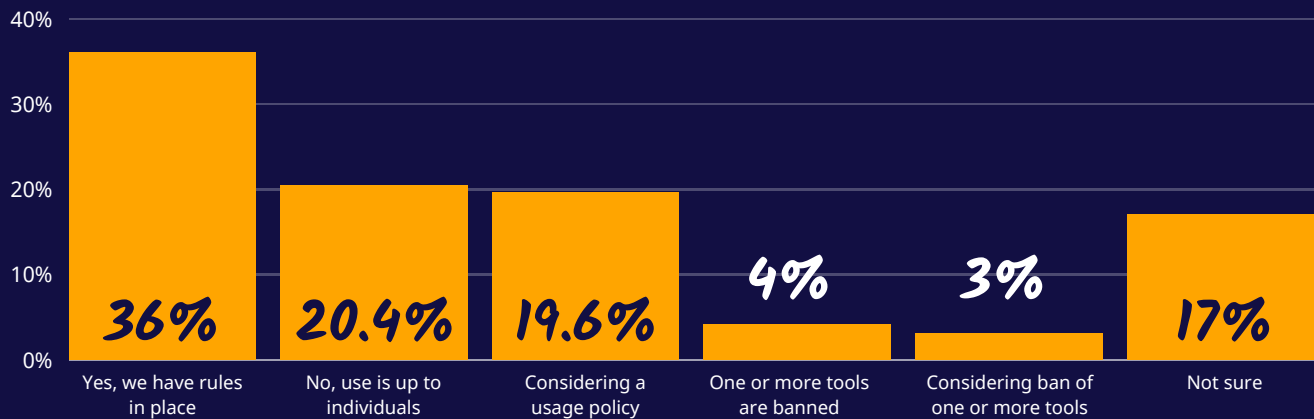
AI providers with a strong commitment to responsible technology use should make a concerted effort to make their security measures and ethical standards easily accessible to potential buyers as early in the process as possible. This will help decision-makers evaluate which vendors suit their ethical standards and increase overall trust in AI technology.

Employee Use
of Popular AI Tools

Despite lacking company-wide guidelines for AI adoption, 36% of respondents regulate individual use of popular tools like ChatGPT

Does your company require employees to follow a usage policy or guidelines when using popular AI tools like ChatGPT from within the organization?

36%	**20.4%**	**19.6%**	**4%**	**3%**	**17%**
Yes, we have rules in place	No, use is up to individuals	Considering a usage policy	One or more tools are banned	Considering ban of one or more tools	Not sure

When it comes to using popular AI-based tools, like ChatGPT, the majority of respondents (56%) said that their company either already has rules in place (36%), or is considering implementing a usage policy (20%). However, this figure was **66% for respondents whose companies were already using their own AI-powered services**.

Seven percent of respondents said their organizations were taking it a step further, either banning or considering banning one or more popular AI tools. Interestingly, this number was significantly lower for respondents whose companies were already using their own AI-powered services, with only 2% of this group citing existing or considered bans. This may indicate an emerging distinction between companies that are generally comfortable with AI, and those that are not.

While some companies appear to be generally more comfortable with AI, this does not necessarily equate to giving employees unbridled access to AI tools. For respondents in general, **20% indicated that individual employees have free rein** on the use of AI tools for the foreseeable future, compared to only 11% of companies already using AI-powered services at the organization level.

This may not necessarily indicate any form of hesitancy on the part of these companies, but rather a sentiment that AI-powered tools both provide value while at the same time requiring oversight. Organizations that use powerful technologies are often more attuned to the need to set boundaries regarding their use.

Recommendations
for Business Leaders

Conversica's Take

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AI adoption on some level is inevitable in today's business world. And, with the right approach, we believe automation and artificial intelligence is a net good. But like all powerful tools, it must be **wielded thoughtfully and carefully** to live up to its full potential.

Reluctance to proactively adopt best practices for AI adoption could lead to a number of issues, ultimately creating more liability than benefit:

- **Security Risks:** Without proper governance, there's an increased risk of data breaches and other security issues that could damage the organization's reputation and bottom line.

- **Regulatory Violations:** Inadequate attention to data regulations could result in non-compliance, leading to hefty fines and damage to the company's reputation.

- **Poor User Experience:** If the AI system isn't trained and refined based on specific business needs and outcomes, it may fail to provide an optimal user experience.

- **Brand Damage:** Without human oversight and brand safety measures, AI could potentially generate content that's inconsistent with the brand's values and voice.

- **Outdated Technology:** Failure to continually evaluate and update the AI technology could result in the system becoming outdated, leading to decreased performance over time.

Recommendations
for Business Leaders

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Robust AI governance is not merely an option but an absolute necessity for any organization seeking to harness the full power of AI responsibly and effectively. To that end, we recommend the following to all decision-makers exploring AI for their organizations.

1. Get ahead of potential issues.

Prioritize the creation of comprehensive guidelines for AI use **before** you adopt a solution. Waiting until after you adopt AI tools exposes your company to unnecessary risk. Ensure your policy has a **checklist of must-have** safeguards, transparency guidelines and security offerings for AI vendors to get your implementation off on the right foot. If you've already adopted AI in your company but don't yet have responsible use guidelines in place, make sure to **audit your AI vendors** once you've completed your policy to ensure they all meet your new standards. This is **doubly important if you plan to adopt AI solutions for external engagement.**

2. Get smart on existing and potential AI regulation.

AI technology generally moves faster than regulatory bodies, but keeping an eye on **what guidelines and laws governments are considering** can help you stay ahead as you adopt and enact solutions—as well as give your team ways to **go beyond what's required legally** for extra security and brand protection. Consider quarterly updates for your executive team on developments in major markets or leading governing bodies so you can align your strategy.

3. Disclosure is power.

The more companies are **transparent and upfront** about how they use AI technologies, deploy vigilant systems, and include humans in the loop, the more they can significantly reduce the risks associated with adoption. When AI touches various constituencies in your organization, make sure you are clear on how it's being used. In addition, **publish your AI ethics policies** and guidelines to demonstrate your commitment to responsible use both to your employees and to external audiences. **Never lie or mislead about the use of AI in your business processes.**

Recommendations
for Business Leaders

Key Ingredients for the Enterprise

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Whether an organization is adopting an AI solution from a vendor or creating it in-house, it should satisfy several crucial requirements—especially in the case of generative AI intended to interact directly with humans outside the organization, such as customers, prospects or the general public.

- **Model Training:** Building and training the model on client-specific data sets is crucial for ensuring the AI system understands and can cater to unique business needs, but most importantly represent the brand with approved content only.

- **Model Refinement:** Defining and refining the model to steer towards desired business outcomes is an ongoing process, ensuring the AI system remains relevant and effective. Even if you use client-specific data for training data, the AI models must be developed to create action versus just providing passive answers to questions. This will require a sophisticated level of model feedback on actions taken by the AI that informs whether the next-best action is accurate or not.

- **Automated Governance:** Building automated governance reduces the risk of rogue or irrelevant responses from the AI, improving the quality and reliability of its output. But most importantly, if the AI is going to take action, governance becomes even more crucial.

- **Human-In-The-Loop (HiTL) Safeguards:** Incorporating human oversight mechanisms ensures AI experiences remain consistently relevant and brand safe. This blend of human and AI efforts often leads to the most effective outcomes. If the model is confused, the human can intervene. If the model is incorrect, the human can optimize the model. Without human oversight, the AI will never achieve high levels of accuracy.

- **Continuous Evolution:** Constant evaluation and evolution of the technology as new enhancements emerge is key to maintaining a state-of-the-art AI system.

Survey *Methodology*

Researchers on behalf of Conversica conducted this survey through SurveyMonkey in July 2023 with a margin of error of +/- 4.472%. Answers were gathered from 500 respondents targeted based on the following attributes:

- → **Employed full-time**
- → **Based in the United States, all regions**
- → **Job Level of Owner / Executive / C-Level, OR**
- → **Senior Management**

Gender was balanced based on census data, and ages were distributed as follows:

	<18	18-29	30-44	45-60	>60
	0%	10%	35%	41%	14%
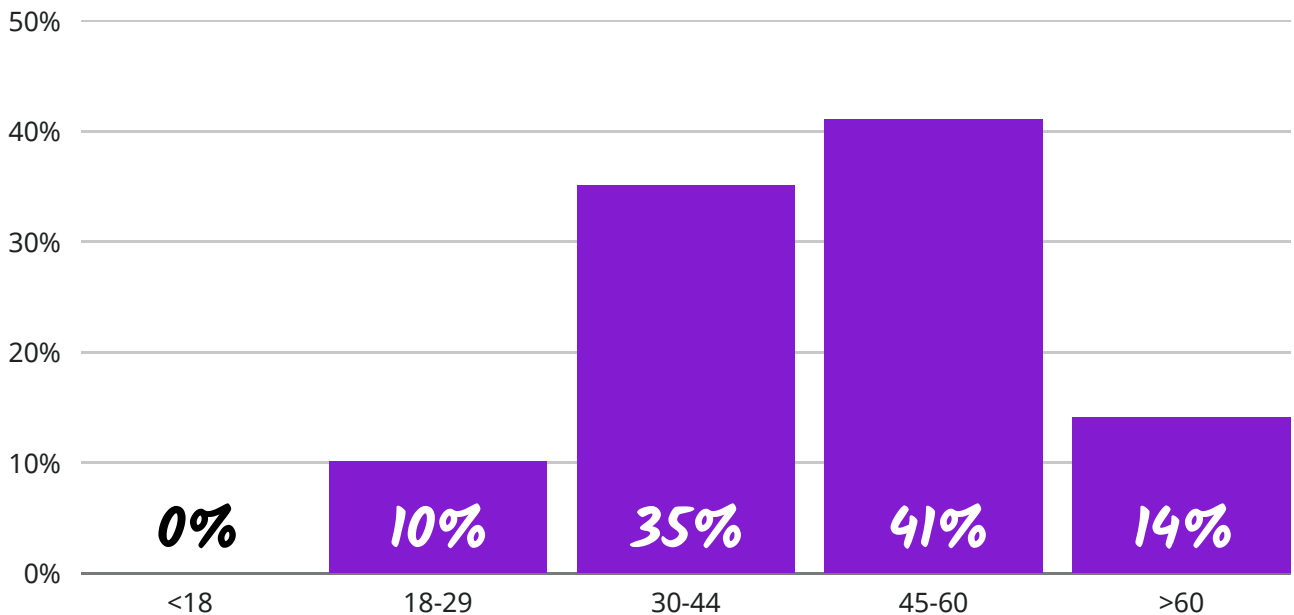
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Conversica

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Conversica's Revenue Digital Assistants™ (RDAs) supercharge workforces to acquire untapped revenue through perfectly structured conversations across chat, email, and SMS. With billions of human interactions spanning more than a decade, Conversica's RDAs have learned to influence and persuade customers and prospects throughout the customer journey lifecycle.

Conversica is the only enterprise-ready solution of its kind that strikes the balance between delivering against modern buyer expectations with generative AI-powered dynamic conversations and the enterprise's need to protect its data and brand.

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