



Confidence, trust and talent upskilling – how the UAE workforce is navigating the AI era

Middle East Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2025: UAE findings



Introduction

As artificial intelligence accelerates and economic transformation reshapes industries, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) workforce represented in PwC's Middle East Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2025 stands at the forefront of change. It reflects a young, highly-educated segment, defined by high engagement in workforce, strong trust in organisational leadership and rapid technology adoption.

The use of AI is already embedded in daily work, productivity gains are tangible and employees demonstrate both optimism and agency in navigating disruption. Yet beneath this confidence there is a workforce that is focused on job security, skills relevance and career progression.



01

A strong workforce foundation anchored in engagement

Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996) make up 54% of respondents in the UAE, supported by a sizeable number of Gen X (those born between 1965 and 1980).

Nearly half of respondents (48%) hold **managerial roles**, while 88% are **employed full time**.

This foundation translates into exceptionally high engagement, with employees in the UAE reporting very strong motivation and pride when it comes to their jobs:

81%

of respondents in the UAE look forward to coming to work, slightly ahead of the Middle East average 78% and notably above the global average of 64%.

77%

are willing to go above and beyond their roles, aligned with the Middle East average, but higher than the global average of 67%.

82%

are proud of the work they do, well above 74% globally.

Emotional indicators reinforce this picture. At least once a week 81% of respondents remain satisfied at work (slightly higher than 80% in the Middle East and 70% globally), while 75% felt inspired, outperforming both the Middle East 68% and global 59% benchmarks.

At the same time, the high intensity of workload is evident. Almost half of the employees surveyed in the UAE report feeling overwhelmed at work at least once a week, broadly in line with the Middle East 48% but notably higher than the global average 35%. This indicates that sustaining performance across organisations in the UAE will depend on how employers manage workload and role clarity, as well as expectations, not just employee motivation.

02

Leadership trust and strategic clarity as enablers of change

Employees in the UAE showcase a strong confidence in leadership, both at the line-manager and senior levels. These factors create an environment in which employees feel supported.

At a manager level, trust is strong. 67% of employees in the UAE trust their direct manager (slightly higher than 66% in the Middle East and 58% globally), while 63% say their manager does what they say they will do, outperforming both the Middle East 59% and global benchmarks 55%. This suggests that employees see their managers as credible, action-oriented leaders who follow through on their commitments.

Perceived managerial care is also stronger in the UAE, as 59% agree their manager cares about their wellbeing, compared with 47% in the Middle East and 52% globally. Together, these findings position line managers as critical anchors for employees, providing guidance and sustained support as organisational expectations and workloads intensify.

Similarly, trust extends to senior leadership.

64%

of UAE employees trust top management, slightly higher than the Middle East 61% and more significantly higher the global average 51%, while

61%

believe senior leaders do what they say, again exceeding the Middle East 57% and global figure 50%.

This suggests higher perceived transparency and stronger follow-through among senior leaders in the UAE.





This trust is reinforced by strong strategic alignment between employees and their organisations, with 74% saying their day-to-day work aligns with long-term organisational goals, well above global levels of 61%. These indicators point to a workforce that understands organisational direction and leadership intent.

A culture of trust is another distinguishing feature of the UAE labour market:

74%

of employees in the UAE feel supported when asking for help.

69%

feel safe trying new approaches.

72%

feel comfortable sharing honest ideas.

This creates conditions that allow organisations to move faster on transformation. At the same time, it reinforces the importance of clear communication, consistent follow-through and visible care from leadership.

03

AI is now embedded in everyday work in the UAE

Adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in the UAE is already advanced, shifting the challenge from adoption to effective integration.

72%

of respondents in the country report having used AI at work in the past 12 months, exceeding both the Middle East 70% and the global benchmark 54%.

44%

use generative AI (GenAI) tools at least monthly, broadly aligned with the Middle East and ahead of global markets.

24%

report daily use of AI.

This indicates that AI has become embedded in routine task execution earlier than in global markets. The advanced level of adoption can be attributed to the UAE's visible commitment to AI through key initiatives such as the UAE National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031, which positions AI as a core enabler across government and priority sectors. As such, this has increased the urgency for organisations to ensure AI use is consistent, well-governed and aligned with role expectations.



Sentiment toward AI reflects optimism tempered by realism.

58%

of employees in the UAE feel excited about how AI may affect their work (aligned with 59% in the Middle East and higher than 41% globally).

54%

feel curious about how AI can affect their work, slightly higher than the Middle East 51% and the global figure 50%.

29%

feel worried about how AI can affect their work, slightly higher than both the Middle East and global averages 26%.

26%

feel confused about how AI can affect their work, broadly aligned with the Middle East 27% but higher than global results 21%.



Employees in the UAE also report a sense of agency, with 51% believing they will have a large or very large degree of control over how technology affects their work, higher than the global average 40% but slightly below the Middle East 55%. This reinforces the importance of leadership clarity and role-level guidance as AI use deepens, alongside the need to equip employees with the skills, tools and platforms required to develop technology capabilities.



Clear AI-driven performance gains

AI adoption in the UAE is already translating into tangible performance gains. 83% of employees report increased productivity, 82% report improvements in work quality and 80% report enhanced creativity, all well above global benchmarks (74%, 75% and 69% respectively) and broadly aligned with Middle East results. These outcomes strengthen the case for employers to move from just encouraging experimentation to deliberate scaling of AI-enabled work practices.

Looking ahead, expectations around AI integration remain positive. Many employees expect continued gains – 61% expect AI to increase productivity, 60% expect improvements in work quality and 55% anticipate greater creativity.



04

Skills and upskilling as a stabilising force

In the UAE, employee priorities align closely with the pace of change and uncertainty created by technological and organisational transformation. Job security 82% and transferable skills 82% development are rated by respondents as very or extremely important.

Confidence in skills continuity is moderate but realistic: 75% expect more than half of their current skills to remain relevant, while 25% anticipate more pronounced disruption - higher than the Middle East 19% and close to global levels 23%. This combination points to a workforce that recognises the need to adapt while maintaining confidence in its ability to do so.

Learning activity is already strong:

69%

report learning new skills in the past year, aligned with the Middle East 69% and above the global average 56%.

67%

report access to learning resources, broadly aligned with the Middle East 68% and above global results 59%.

65%

say their manager supports them in building new capabilities, exceeding both the Middle East 63% and global responses 57%.

The opportunity now is to anchor this learning more tightly to evolving roles, ensuring skills investment keeps up with how work is constantly changing.

The UAE workforce is engaged, digitally capable and ambitious. Sustaining this momentum will depend on balance, aligning AI integration with skills development, strengthening career pathways and managing performance intensity so that engagement remains durable. Organisations that connect productivity gains to wellbeing will be best positioned to transform confidence into long-term capability.



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