



AI IN BUSINESS

AI FATIGUE: THE HIDDEN CHALLENGE IN THE RACE FOR AI ADOPTION

by David De Cremer, Kwong Chan, and Jin Kim

Perhaps it's unsurprising that even initial enthusiasts for AI, when exposed to the relentless narrative and often-complex issues surrounding integrating the technology into their real-world working lives, have begun to experience a certain weariness with it all. The phenomenon has been christened "AI fatigue". What's to be done?

Artificial intelligence has become the defining technological revolution of our era, with organizations across industries racing to integrate AI solutions into their operations. According to McKinsey's 2025 AI adoption survey, 78 percent of companies now utilize AI in at least one business function, representing a significant jump from just 55 percent the previous year. Even more telling is that 92 percent of executives anticipate increasing their AI investments over the next three years, signaling that AI has transitioned from experimental technology to core business infrastructure.



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At first glance, these statistics suggest unbridled enthusiasm for AI adoption. Yet beneath this surface-level excitement, a troubling counter-trend is emerging. For example, an EY survey of 500 senior executives reveals that nearly half report declining organizational enthusiasm for AI integration (Diasio, Gusher, & Kapoor, 2024). At the same time, social media are reporting that companies are starting to experience a backlash from their employees when it comes to the increasing use of generative AI (Slashdot, 2025). And, in our work as consultants, across different industries, we hear similar voices arguing that continuously talking about AI is generating feelings of exhaustion and skepticism among employees and leaders alike.

These observations come together in a phenomenon we term "AI fatigue," which represents a critical challenge for organizations navigating digital transformation. Unlike simple resistance to change, AI fatigue stems from prolonged exposure to narratives

and communication strategies relentlessly talking about technological advancement, particularly when adequate organizational support is lacking. If left unaddressed, this fatigue threatens to undermine the very benefits that AI promises to deliver. Despite this clear need, no real effort has been made to understand this phenomenon and its consequences – something we aim to do in this piece.

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Defining the Contours of AI Fatigue

To properly address AI fatigue, we must first distinguish it from related but distinct concepts that often get conflated in discussions about AI adoption.

AI fatigue should not be confused with algorithm aversion, where individuals resist using AI-driven tools despite evidence of their effectiveness (Burton, Stein, & Jensen, 2020). This aversion typically stems from distrust of automated decision-making or preference for human judgment. AI fatigue, by contrast, often affects even those who initially embraced AI but have become worn down by its constant evolution.

Similarly, AI fatigue differs from general technology fatigue, which describes burnout resulting from excessive screen time and digital overload (Halupa & Bolliger, 2020). While both involve exhaustion, AI fatigue specifically relates to the psychological toll of keeping pace with intense communications and demonstrations of rapid AI advancements and organizational adoption pressures.

Nor should AI fatigue be mistaken for principled opposition to AI based on ethical concerns. The individuals experiencing fatigue frequently recognize AI's potential value but feel overwhelmed by the speed of its rollout and the nonstop messaging about its sweeping impact (i.e., it will change everything).

At its core, AI fatigue represents the collective mental and emotional exhaustion that individuals experience in response to the organization's continuous and intense communication about the breakneck speed of AI development, adoption, and impact.

The Roots of AI Fatigue: The use of an intense narrative

The dominant narrative surrounding AI adoption often frames it as an inevitable, mandatory transformation. Organizations frequently communicate this message through "adapt or die" rhetoric that positions AI as an unstoppable force reshaping industry. While intended to motivate, this communicative approach frequently backfires by creating psychological resistance. Employees who feel coerced into change by their organization's AI communication strategy, even when they intellectually recognize

its benefits, often develop subconscious resistance that manifests as fatigue.

Compounding this problem is the unprecedented pace of AI advancement. New models, tools, and applications emerge at a rate that makes meaningful assimilation nearly impossible. Professionals across industries find themselves bombarded with a constant stream of AI-related news, training requirements, vendor pitches, and internal communications and mandates. Unlike previous technological shifts that unfolded over years, AI's rapid evolution leaves little time for proper digestion and integration, resulting in cognitive overload, especially when the communication strategy is aimed at emphasizing that resistance is futile (i.e., AI is inevitable).

The gap between AI's promise and reality that is increasingly emerging in the data about AI's ROI further exacerbates fatigue. The technology has been marketed as a panacea capable of automating complex processes, predicting trends with perfect accuracy, and revolutionizing entire industries overnight. In practice, many AI implementations fail to meet these lofty expectations due to data quality issues, integration challenges, or simply being applied to the wrong problems. When employees repeatedly witness these shortfalls, initial enthusiasm gives way to skepticism and disengagement.

Perhaps most insidiously, AI's relentless advancement creates widespread professional insecurity. Even technically proficient workers report feeling inadequate as they struggle to keep pace with the communicative pressure to be abreast of new developments. This phenomenon is particularly acute among non-technical staff who worry

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about being left behind in an AI-driven workplace. The resulting impostor syndrome (no one really understands AI) further contributes to the exhaustion characterizing AI fatigue.

The Consequences of Unaddressed Fatigue

Left unchecked, AI fatigue can undermine digital transformation efforts in several tangible ways.

Perhaps most directly, fatigue leads to lower adoption rates as employees disengage from AI initiatives. Even when tools demonstrably improve efficiency, fatigued workers often revert to familiar methods rather than invest energy in learning new systems. This behavioral resistance to learning and embracing a new technology frequently goes unmeasured in adoption metrics, as employees may technically comply with mandates while finding ways to minimize actual usage and staying updated about the latest developments. In fact, in a survey study, we found some tentative evidence that, once AI fatigue sets in, employees are less motivated to embracing the use of AI and learning about it.

The cognitive load associated with constant adaptation and processing the continuous communication stream may also diminish overall productivity. Employees juggling AI-related changes alongside their regular responsibilities frequently report decision fatigue and reduced creative capacity. Ironically, tools meant to enhance efficiency can end up having the opposite effect when implemented without regard for human limitations.

Perhaps most damaging in the long term is how AI fatigue breeds organizational cynicism toward technological change. Employees who experience poorly managed AI adoption often develop generalized skepticism that makes future innovation

initiatives more difficult to implement (Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997). This cultural resistance can persist long after specific tools have been mastered.

Strategies for Sustainable AI Adoption

Addressing AI fatigue requires moving beyond technical implementation to focus on human factors in digital transformation. Several strategies can help organizations maintain momentum while mitigating fatigue.

Reframing the narrative around AI adoption represents a crucial first step. Rather than positioning AI as an unstoppable force that workers must adapt to, successful organizations should emphasize more in their communication how AI can empower employees and contribute to their interests. For example, replacing fear-based messaging like "AI will replace workers who don't adapt" with more positive framing such as "AI enhances your capabilities" can significantly reduce resistance. This approach acknowledges AI's transformative potential while centering human agency in the change process.

Learning and development (L&D) initiatives require particular attention in combating fatigue. L&D initiatives are especially needed with respect to AI adoption, because this technology will only create new and sustainable value if employees understand how the tech works and get equipped with the right business and soft skills to use AI in ways that creates value for the company and its stakeholders. Traditional training approaches, however, usually overwhelm employees with lengthy, technical sessions that often exacerbate rather than alleviate stress. More-effective organizations implement just-in-time learning systems that deliver bite-sized, role-specific training when needed. Some appoint internal AI champions who provide peer support and model successful adoption at a human scale.

Managing expectations represents another critical communication intervention. Leaders who transparently communicate both AI's potential and its current limitations help prevent the disillusionment that fuels fatigue. Highlighting small, tangible wins—like time savings on routine

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tasks—builds confidence more effectively than grand promises of transformation.

Perhaps most importantly, leaders must adopt communication strategies for creating cultures that normalize experimentation and tolerate initial failures. When employees feel safe testing AI applications without fear of reprisal for imperfect results, they're more likely to persist through the inevitable learning curve. Celebrating learning efforts rather than just outcomes reinforces this experimental mindset.

Finally, regular check-ins to assess workforce well-being can help organizations pace their AI adoption appropriately. When signs of fatigue emerge, successful leaders demonstrate the flexibility to consolidate gains on existing implementations before introducing new tools. This measured approach prevents the cognitive overload that undermines sustainable adoption.

The Path Forward

The organizations that will ultimately succeed in their AI transformations are not necessarily those that adopt fastest, but those that adopt most

thoughtfully and communicate accordingly. By recognizing AI fatigue as a real and consequential phenomenon, leaders can implement communication and intervention strategies that maintain momentum while protecting their most valuable asset—their people. Therefore, the challenge ahead lies not in resisting AI's advance, but in shaping the communication about its adoption in ways that energize, rather than exhaust, the workforce. And, in doing so, in the race to implement AI, the true winners may be those who recognize that, sometimes, slower implementation leads to faster, more enduring transformation. 

END NOTE

In this survey study (202 full-time-employed participants), we first asked participants to recall when their organization communicated that they were adopting AI (Time 1) and respond to the question: "At that time, I felt exhausted by the message at my organization that AI was inevitable." Subsequently, we asked participants to think about their current experiences (Time 2) with AI at work and respond again to the same question about the inevitability of AI. The comparison between Time 1 and Time 2 revealed that these employees felt more exhausted over time when the organization continuously communicated that AI was inevitable. Interestingly, this emerging AI fatigue was found to correlate ($r = 0.15$, $p < .05$) with a measure of motivation to learn about and use AI (including the items "I am motivated to learn more about AI in the future", "I am discouraged to learn more about AI in the future", "I am interested in using AI more", and "I am interested in using AI in more advanced ways."; Cronbach's alpha: 0.92), indicating that the more AI fatigue was experienced, the less likely employees were to be motivated and interested in learning about AI and using the technology in the future.

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