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AI SKILLS

71% of Professionals Overestimate Their AI Skills — Here's What That Means for Your Business

Most people think they're competent with AI. They're not. A Stanford expert analyzed 22,000 professionals and found something revealing. Here's the gap—and how to close it in 90 days.

Pedro Bandeira · Analog AI Pulse · March 7, 2026 · 11 min read

The fifth failure point deserves its own callout: most companies don't measure. They don't track whether the agent actually produces better results than the human process. You need metrics. "Is this 20% faster? 15% cheaper? Higher quality?" Without measurement, you're flying blind.

REAL EXAMPLE: WORKERA'S OWN AGENT IMPLEMENTATION

When a new enterprise customer onboards, there are 15 manual steps. Check contract details. Approve. Set up the customer in the system. Generate onboarding emails. Create learning paths.

Workera built an agent that handles about 80% automatically. A human still reviews key decisions. Result: time dropped from 2

days to 3 hours. Quality is actually more consistent. This is the template—not replacement, but massive efficiency gain with human judgment still intact.

The skill that AI cannot replace: agency

In a world of increasingly powerful AI, what separates the people who thrive from those who get replaced?

It's not technical skill. It's agency. The ability to identify a problem, figure out how to solve it, and execute. To take initiative without being told. To iterate and improve. AI can do a lot of things. It cannot want things. It cannot set goals. It cannot decide what matters. That's uniquely human.

Here's the hard truth: if you're the kind of person who waits to be told what to do—who needs a manager to hand you tasks—AI actually replaces you faster. Because you're essentially doing what an AI agent could do. But if you have agency, if you can look at a situation, decide what to do, and get it done, AI amplifies your capabilities massively.

The skills that die are purely execution. Input → process → output, no judgment required. AI does that better and faster. The skills that survive are judgment, creativity, relationship building, complex problem solving, ethical reasoning. These require understanding context and nuance. AI is bad at this.

And there's a third category: new bridge skills. Prompt engineering, AI workflow design, knowing when to trust AI and when not to. These are the in-demand skills right now.

Why Gen Z isn't actually ahead (and universities are in trouble)

This breaks the narrative. You'd think digital natives would dominate AI. They're not.

Gen Z is very good at consuming AI. Using ChatGPT. Generating content. But they're weak on fundamentals. They don't understand how AI works. They don't have the critical thinking to evaluate AI output. They trust it too much. And many lack the professional skills—writing, communication, project management—that you need to use AI effectively in a work context.

They're fluent in the interface but illiterate in the concepts. When AI fails—and it does—they don't know why and they can't fix it. That's a problem.

As for universities: the value is declining unless you're at a top-tier school where the brand, network, and peer group are the draw. The bundle is breaking apart. Content is becoming commoditized (most university lectures are less good than what's free online). The curriculum iteration cycle is too slow. By the time a university updates a program, the world has already moved on. We'll see more micro-credentials, more continuous learning, more on-the-job training. The degree becomes less important than what you can actually do.

Vibe coding hype vs. reality

There's an ongoing wave of hype around "vibe coding"—describe what you want in natural language, AI builds it. Powerful concept. Messy reality.

Most vibe-coded products are demos, not products. The gap between "it works on my laptop" and "it works at scale with real users" is enormous. Real software requires reliability, security, performance, user

experience, support. Engineering discipline. You cannot handwave these with prompts.

Vibe coding is amazing for prototyping, for internal tools, for MVPs. But for products that compete in the market? You still need engineering. The bar is high. Calendly is actually powerful. Thousands of features. To replace Calendly, you'd need to build something significantly better. A weekend of vibe coding won't get you there.

Three moves for 2026 (and beyond)

If you're 25-40 years old, ambitious, and want to actually benefit from the AI shift, here's what to do:

Move 1: Learn the foundations

30 days. Understand LLMs, transformers, capabilities, fine-tuning, RAG, agents. Not code. Concepts. This is the baseline.

Move 2: Assess yourself honestly

Take an assessment. See where you actually are vs. where you think you are. The gap itself becomes your roadmap.

Move 3: Build a daily learning habit

5 minutes a day for 30 days. Read posts from people you trust. Try a new tool. Experiment. Most people quit on day two. Don't be most people.

If you focus for a day, you're in the top X% of the world. For a week non-stop, top 10%. For a month, top 1%. To get to top 0.1%, you need to maintain the habit longer. But that 0.1% exists. You could be there.

What this means for CEO strategy

If you're running operations, here's what to think about:

First, measure your company's AI literacy. Workers and others have tools. You can't improve what you don't measure. Many companies are in a state of false confidence—they think their team is competent, they're not.

Second, identify your biggest process bottlenecks. Where are you spending the most human hours on repetitive, rules-based work? That's where AI ROI is highest. Start there, not with the tasks you hope AI can do.

Third, invest in upskilling your existing people. The market for AI talent is extremely competitive and expensive. It's much more cost-effective to take your existing team and invest in their development.

The data is clear: companies that invest in AI literacy and have a systematic approach to upskilling outperform. The ones that fail are those that buy Copilot licenses for everyone and think that's enough. That's like giving everyone a piano and expecting them to play Beethoven. You need training.

THE INEQUALITY RISK

Here's what keeps experts up at night: companies and countries that have access to AI and invest in upskilling will thrive. Those that don't will fall behind. And that gap could become very dangerous. This isn't just about individual skills. It's about institutional capability and competitive advantage on a macro scale.

The Bottom Line

2026 isn't the year AI replaces everyone. It's the year the gap between the competent and the delusional becomes undeniable.

71% of professionals overestimate their AI skills. That's not a judgment. It's data. And it creates an opportunity. If you invest 90 days in real learning—not passive exposure, but structured work—you'll be ahead of 99% of the market. Most people won't. Most people will stay comfortable with false confidence.

The question isn't whether AI will change your business. It's whether you'll be the one driving that change or reacting to it.



Get the Full Framework

The 90-day upskilling plan, failure modes breakdown, and assessment framework (PDF, 892 KB)

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