

The State of Nonprofit Teams

The AI adoption
balancing act for
nonprofit teams

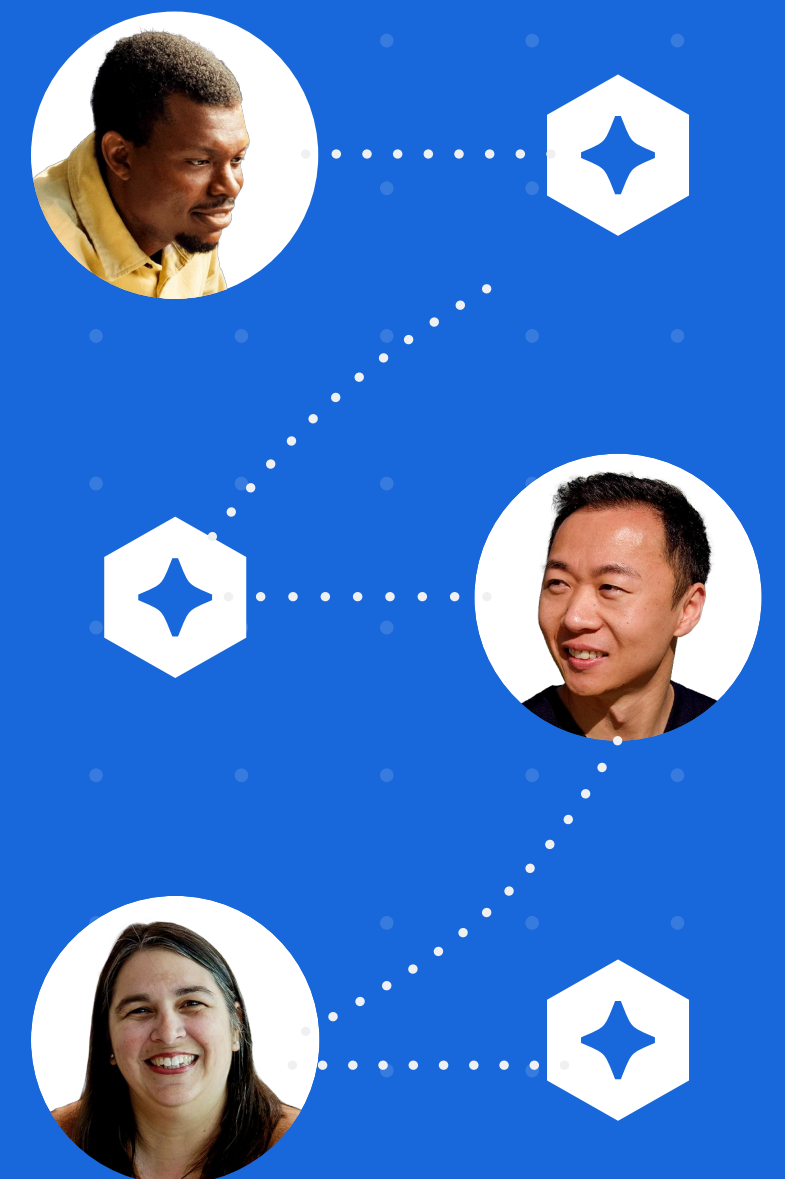




Table of contents

“At the Atlassian Foundation, we believe the instinct to put people first is one of the nonprofit sector's greatest strengths – and it shouldn't be left behind in the pressure to adopt AI.

Our research is clear: teams that pair their human-centered values with a tech-informed perspective are the ones achieving meaningfully better outcomes with AI.”



Olivia Khalili
Head of the Atlassian Foundation

3	Introduction
5	Different AI approaches
8	The impact on teamwork
9	A balanced AI approach
10	How to achieve balance
13	Conclusion
15	Appendix





Nonprofits are no stranger to adaptability. Today’s pace of change is testing even the most resilient organizations. The rise of AI is simultaneously a major contributor and a compelling solution to the disruption. But many teams are far from calling AI a true solution to some of their core challenges.



Reality check

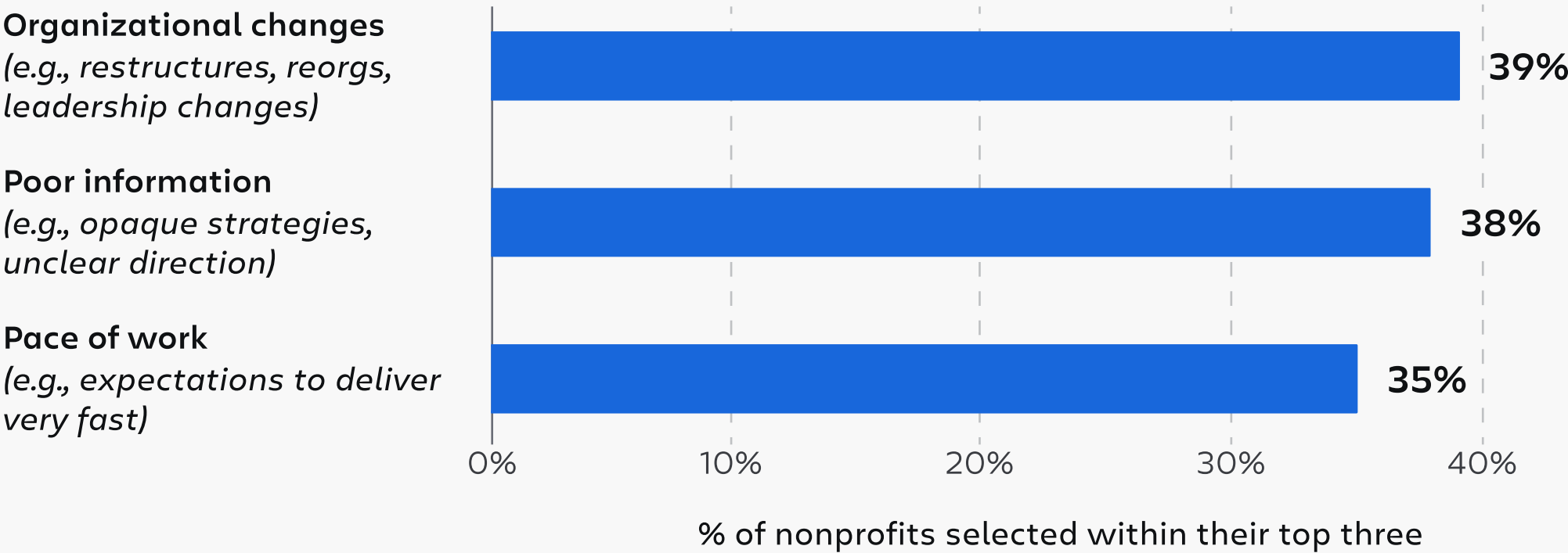
In *The State of Nonprofit Teams* 2025, 51% of nonprofits believed that AI would improve the speed and quality of their team’s work. This year only 40% agree that when using AI their team moves faster without sacrificing quality or context.

In Atlassian's [2026 State of Teams Report](#), the Teamwork Lab found that AI efficiencies are fragmenting rather than transforming how teams work. The solution to that fragmentation? Re-evaluating core teamwork foundations and factoring them into your AI strategy to enable teams of humans to collaborate effectively with AI.

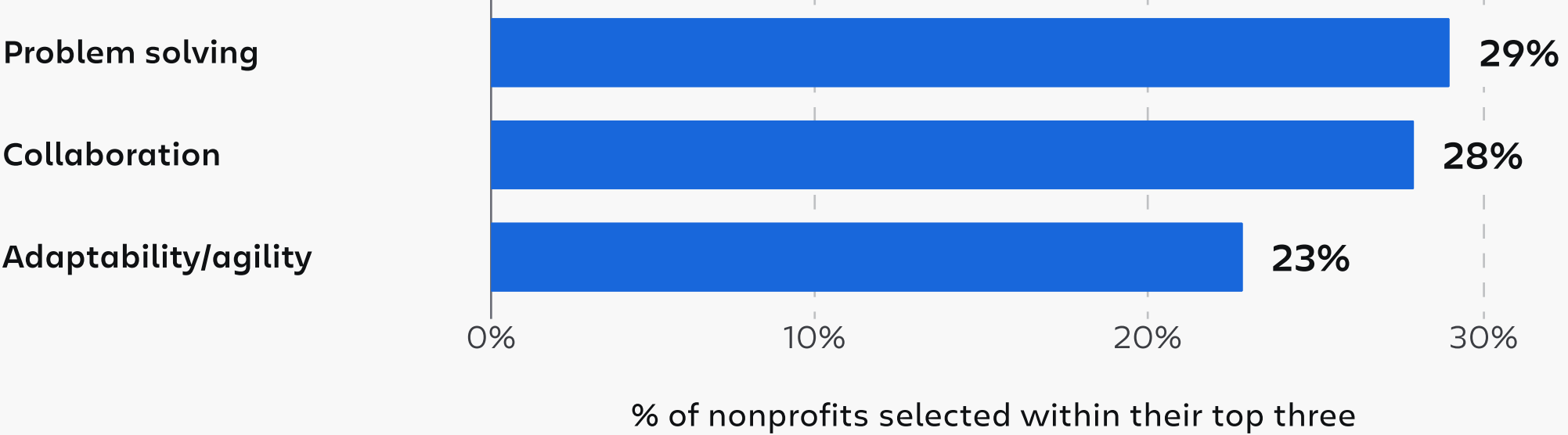
Many trends from the 306 nonprofit respondents in this year’s survey [echo the report’s broader findings](#) (start with the main report if you haven’t already). But one critical difference emerged; nonprofit teams are taking a distinctly more human-focused approach to AI implementation.

In this companion piece, we'll check in on how nonprofits are progressing toward developing the foundations of modern teamwork and dig into the trade-offs of that human-focused approach when applied to AI implementation.

Top reasons work feels overwhelming or unsustainable for nonprofit knowledge workers



Strongest skills of nonprofit teams today–top 3 responses





The nonprofit teamwork evolution

AI is reshaping how work gets done. 59% of nonprofit organizations are changing how they work—trying new tools, new routines, new ways of accomplishing tasks.

The [State of Teams Report](#) shared that teams finding success with AI (improved work prioritization, collaboration, and team connection) have reshaped their ways of working by investing in three key areas of modern teamwork in the AI era:

1. Context

Building organizational shared knowledge and goals

2. Workflows

Clear systems to plan and track work across teams and AI

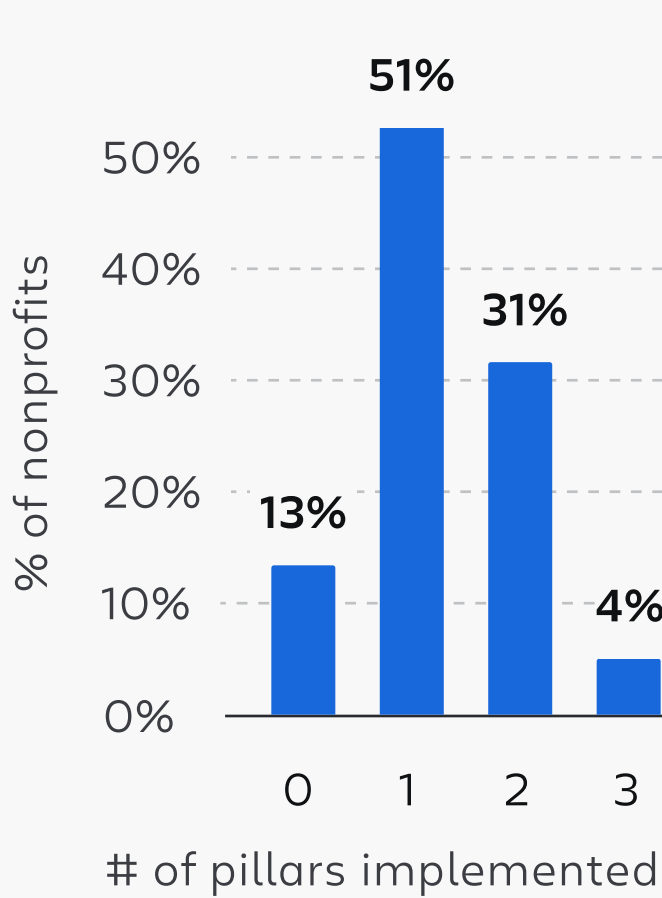
3. Culture

Teams that celebrate human-AI collaboration and provide employees with continuous learning and experimentation opportunities.

Nonprofit teams are early in their development of these three pillars. We found that most organizations are implementing one pillar out of three (51%).

Only 4% of organizations are implementing all three.

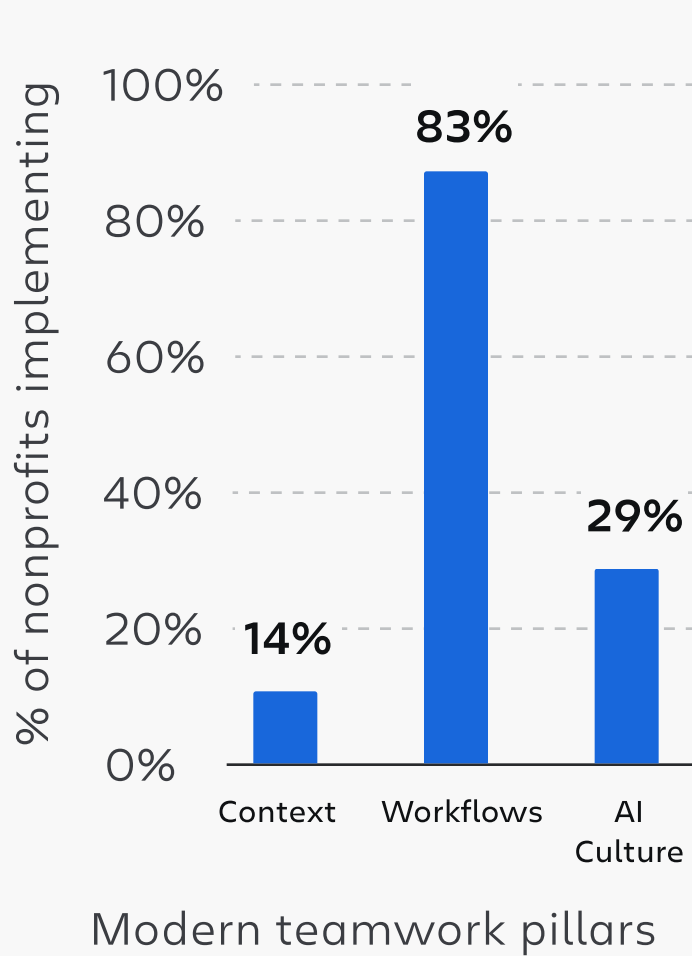
AI era teamwork pillars implemented by nonprofit teams



If your team is early in the process of investing in these areas, we’re catching you at a great time.

As you start to develop your organization’s context, workflows and AI culture, factor them into your AI strategy.

Adoption of each teamwork pillar



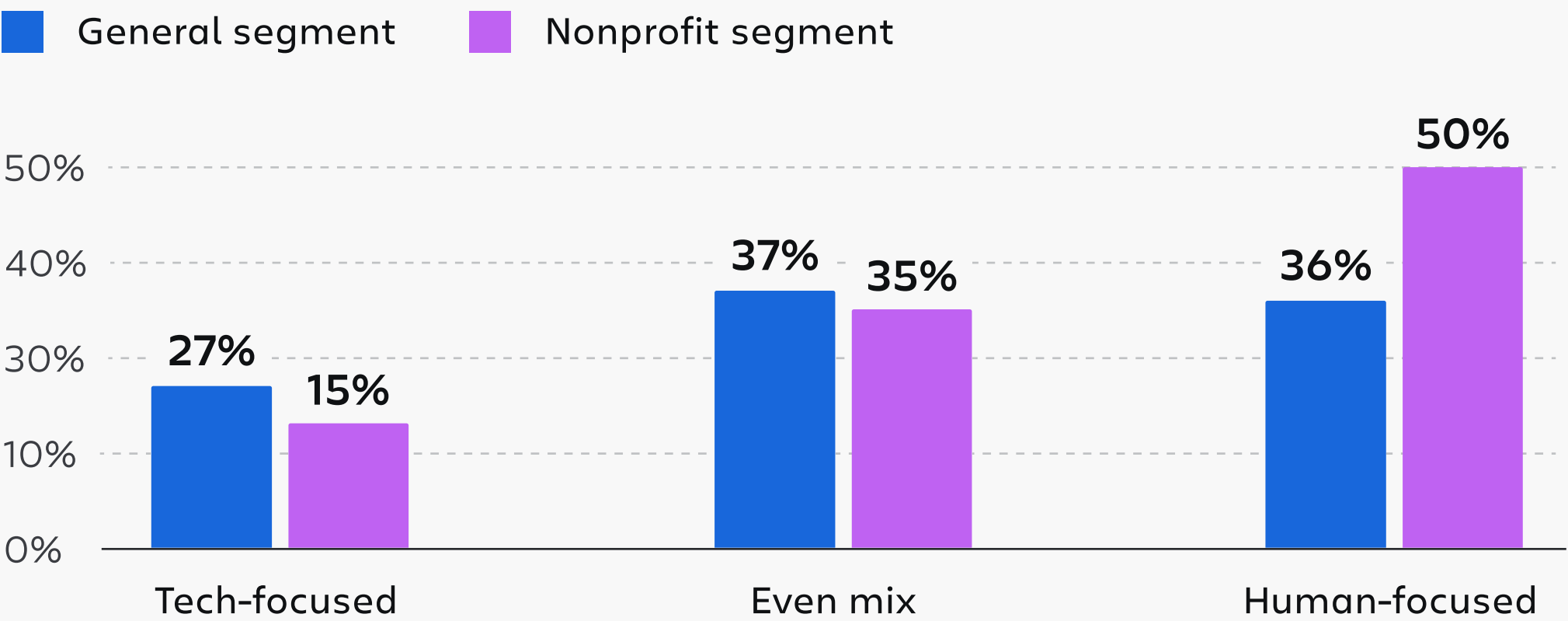
The approach your team takes to embedding AI across your teamwork matters—it directly shapes the value your team will see from your AI investment.



Approaches to AI implementation

Nonprofits overwhelmingly take a human-focused approach to implementing AI. Human-centered values are often a nonprofit's greatest strength.

How do you describe the focus on technology versus humans as your organization implements AI?



How Atlassian defines a tech- and human-focused approach

- **Human-focused approach:** AI strategy primarily designed around people - starting from their roles, skills, values, and workflows, then introducing AI in ways that support their judgment, relationships, and mission, even if that slows down adoption.
- **Tech-focused approach:** AI strategy primarily designed around the capabilities of the technology - choosing tools, building integrations, and automating workflows to drive speed and efficiency, then asking people to adapt.

To effectively leverage AI at work, nonprofit teams say the following areas need the most attention:

✓ Change management 30%

✓ Workforce skills 30%

✓ Data and knowledge foundations 27%

Can human-focused AI implementation check all those boxes? Can tech-focused implementation? Let's explore the pros and cons of each approach and how to implement AI in a way that actually delivers value for your team, not just isolated efficiencies for individuals.



Tech-focused: initial gains and longer term strain

60% of tech-focused teams say their leaders view AI as a “magic switch” that will fix all their problems. These teams have broader AI adoption and find better results in speed and quality of work; but that approach isn’t always so magical. The laser focus on tech is coming at a cost.

Pros

77%

agree that AI makes their **teams faster** (10% higher than human-focused)

74%

agree AI improves the **quality of their work** (11% higher than human-focused)

Cons

44%

feel **powerless** in how AI is being implemented (13%+ higher than more human-focused approaches)

51%

feel there’s **too much pressure to innovate** in their job (14%+ higher than more human-focused approaches)

12%

more **time wasted** on non-critical tasks

“We don’t need everything to happen through AI—it’s a use-case specific decision. It’s about respecting existing systems that work while pragmatically applying AI where it offers a distinct, high-impact advantage over traditional methods.”

Paulus van der Kolk, Head of Product, ReachOut

This might make you think - “hmm we nonprofits are on to something, with our human-focused approach to AI implementation!” Let’s see what the data says...



Human-focused: good intentions, underwhelming outcomes

Teams that take a human-focused approach have the least AI adoption. This approach to AI implementation, while slower, does lead to better team outcomes compared to tech-focused teams in two important areas: teams feel more involved in how AI is implemented and spend less time on miscellaneous tasks. Unfortunately, this approach still leaves professionals unsure of how and why they should use AI.

Pros

43%

feel they have **power in how AI is implemented** (7% higher than tech-focused)

7%

less time spent on miscellaneous tasks than other teams

Cons

31%

don't get the point of using AI on their team

42%

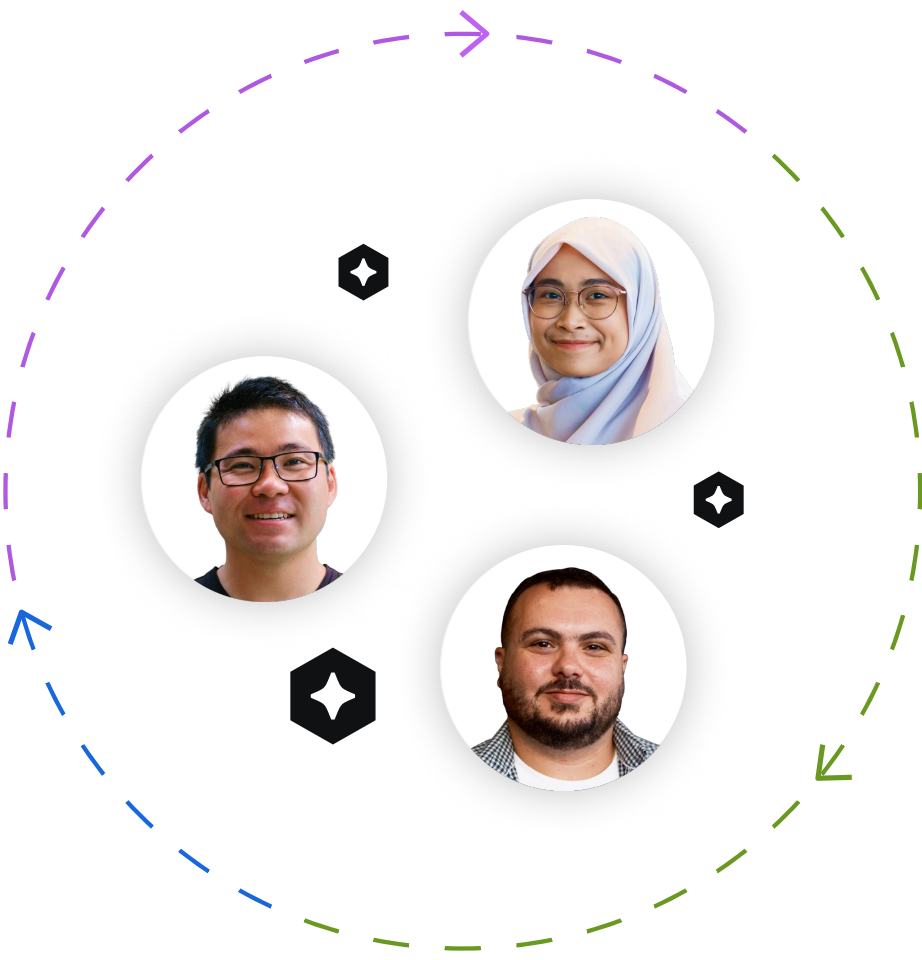
agree that they're being **told to use AI but not taught how**

2x

less likely to have invested in all three areas of modern teamwork (context, workflows, AI culture)

“While human expertise is essential to ensure appropriate tech solutions, excessive human oversight reduces AI effectiveness and organisational benefits. Our next step for MSF is to progress from AI in personal efficiencies to AI for organisational efficiency.”

Yuen Ai Lee, Head of Data and Insights, Médecins Sans Frontières Australia

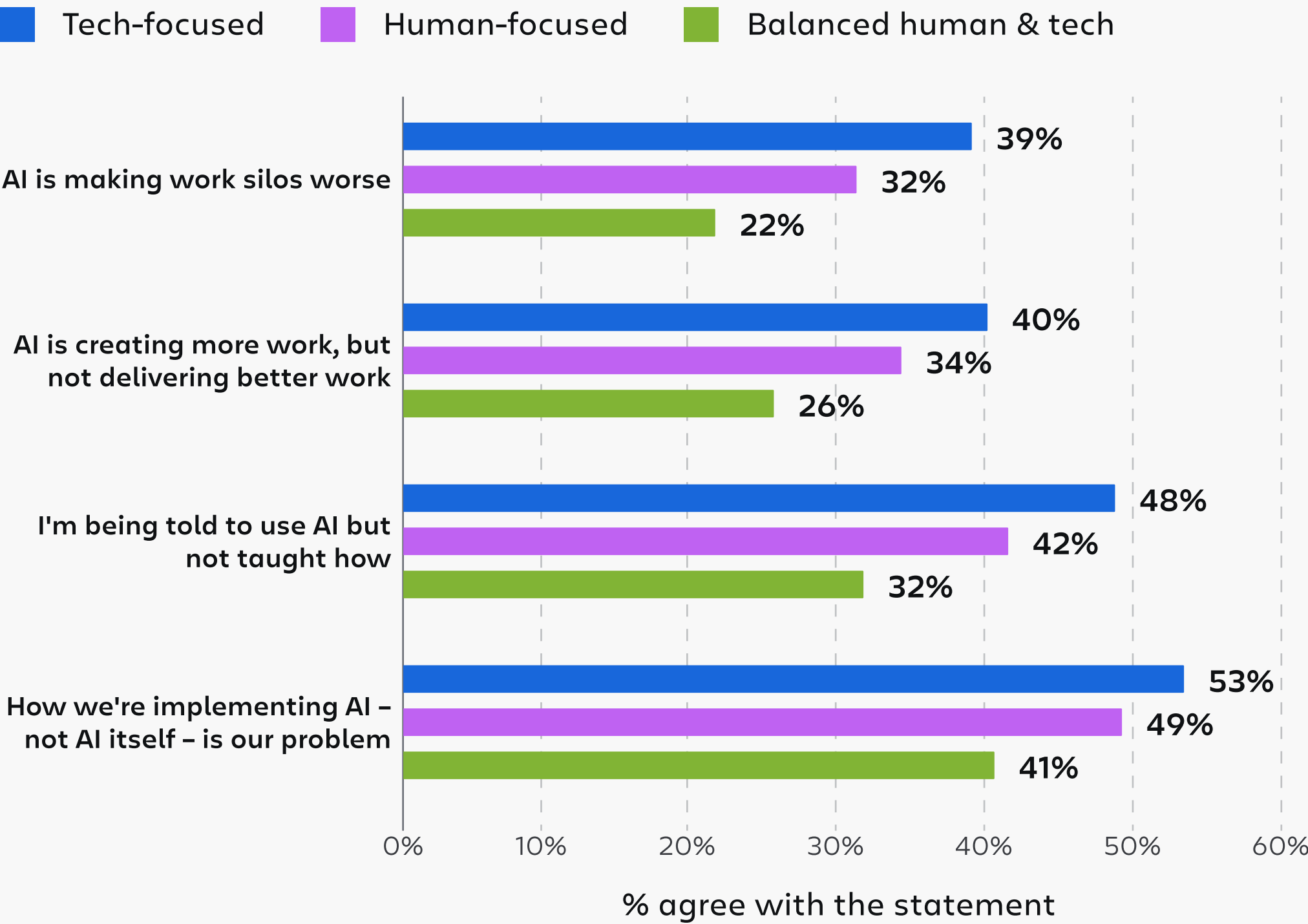




The effects of different AI approaches

The downsides of leaning too far in the tech-focused or human-focused direction outweigh the benefits. Overall, around half of teams in either extreme feel that how they’re implementing AI - not AI itself - is their problem.

Challenges with over-indexing on a tech-focused or human-focused AI approach



With AI implementations, many teams are leaning on instinctual human-focused or tech-focused approaches.

For nonprofits, this is a moment to rethink that instinct. By choosing a deliberately balanced approach, teams are more likely to see meaningful gains from the time and energy they invest embedding AI across their teamwork.

Both human-focused and tech-focused teams more often face teamwork challenges with AI.



The AI implementation sweet spot

Nonprofits can supplement their human-focused strength with a tech-informed perspective to achieve a balanced approach that unlocks the collective benefits of AI for their team.

To effectively interweave your team's context, workflows and culture with AI, teams need to be intentional about both the technology and the mindset, skills, and rituals that help teams use it well.

Teams that strike the balance are:

40% more likely to

- have clear goals and priorities
- avoid having too many concurrent initiatives
- have time and capacity to coordinate

50% more likely to

- avoid teams working on duplicative work
- have goals and objectives aligned across teams

1.6x more likely to

- have invested in all three pillars of modern teamwork

To support your team in developing a balanced approach, we've created a conversation guide to facilitate team thinking on how AI can be embedded across your organization's modern teamwork pillars. It's meant to encourage your team to consider both the technical and human implications of AI within your organization's context, workflows, and culture.



“Trust is a nonprofit's greatest currency, which is exactly why we need to approach AI intentionally. Getting implementation right means keeping both your team and the technology in mind. That's what allows you to leverage these tools while actually maintaining the trust of your people and your stakeholders.”

Vishal Ghotge, CEO, Kiva.org



The next pages share a conversation guide to help your team achieve a balanced AI implementation across your team's context, workflows, and AI culture.

How to achieve a balanced AI implementation:

Context

Humans and AI are most effective when they have access to all the necessary context to accomplish a given task and everyone has a clear understanding of the team's goals.

A balanced AI implementation approach relies on your team's ability to capture knowledge and organize it.

HUMAN

Knowledge

- What knowledge is living un-captured in people's brains or in meetings? What beliefs or attitudes are preventing us from sharing this knowledge?
- How will we prepare our team for changes in technology and ways of working? What training and support will we need to ensure our knowledge is captured so it can be better leveraged by our team and AI?

Goals

- As work changes, how are we ensuring team members are clearer than ever on how their work contributes to our goals and mission?

TECH

Knowledge

- What is our system for organizing information and capturing data? Is it accessible to and appropriately restricted from AI?
- What existing systems, data sources, and technical infrastructure must be in place for our AI implementation to be most effective?

Goals

- How do we prioritize our AI investments in ways that will help us contribute most to our highest priority goals?

Try this:

- [Change management communication with video](#)
- [Clutter-free Confluence](#)

See it in action:

- [Webinar: Make strategy actionable - Teamwork Collection for social impact leadership teams](#)





How to achieve a balanced AI implementation:

Workflows

Now is a better time than ever to rethink *how* your team works towards your mission. Ensure you're thinking about those new approaches in a balanced way with these questions:

HUMAN

Plan and track work

- What work does our team find meaningful versus tedious, and how do we ensure AI removes drudgery without removing purpose?
- Which AI applications would address our team's most pressing pain points and build trust in the technology?
- How do we ensure we are not scaling individual efficiencies in silos vs. improving outcomes for the whole team?

TECH

Plan and track work

- Which repetitive tasks in our workflow can be fully automated by AI to free up employee time?
- Which AI use cases offer the quickest wins or highest ROI to build momentum for our implementation?
- How can we structure our AI implementation to maximize operational efficiency and scale our programs?

Try this:

- [Defining AI's project role](#)
- [Your AI teammate - building your first agent](#)

See it in action:

- [Check out how Education Outcomes Fund evolved their reporting process with Rovo](#)



How to achieve a balanced AI implementation:

Culture

To build a culture around AI, you need to balance the development of your team's technical and human skills while encouraging experimentation. It's key to ask questions that will help shape your team's culture and ones to evaluate if it's successful.

HUMAN

Team development

- How can we ensure a culture of psychological safety where people feel comfortable experimenting, failing, and asking questions about AI?
- What human skills (critical thinking, ethical reasoning, creativity, empathy) do we need to strengthen as we work alongside AI?

Measure success

- How will we measure whether AI is improving the experience and outcomes for our staff, volunteers, and the communities we serve?
- How will we receive feedback to understand if our staff and volunteers feel that they can trust AI and feel comfortable using it?

TECH

Team development

- How can we build our technical culture (data literacy, digital fluency, comfort with automation) needed to successfully adopt AI?
- What AI training programs, certifications, and technical resources will we provide to build staff capabilities and trust in AI?

Measure success

- What performance metrics (accuracy, speed, cost savings) will we use to measure our AI system's effectiveness?
- How will we receive regular feedback to understand AI adoption and performance?

Try this:

- [Ritual reset](#)
- [Measure AI ROI](#)
- [Accelerate feedback loops with video](#)

See it in action:

- [Trailblazing with Rovo](#) - Nonprofit organizations share insights from their AI implementation journeys

There are many more questions that could be asked, these can be a jumping off point for your team. We hope this inspires you to ask questions you normally wouldn't.



Conclusion

In this moment, changes to teamwork and technology can feel overwhelming or forced. Pressure to adopt AI without direction produces activity without outcomes. Evolving teamwork is not about chasing every new AI capability, nor about protecting current ways of working at all costs.

Start by assessing where your team stands across your organization’s context, workflows, and culture. Then take a balanced approach to rethink how your team can work to embed AI. This is when AI becomes part of advancing teamwork, not just performative productivity.

Want to learn more?

[Check out the full 2026 State of Teams Report](#)

[Trust guide: Secure Cloud for Nonprofits](#)

[See other nonprofit resources](#)

When considering the merits, risks, and unknowns of AI adoption for your organization you will inevitably need to work through contradictions, make tradeoffs, and think deeply about how to best achieve your mission and serve your stakeholders. When that level of intention and thoughtfulness is brought to teamwork and tech adoption, your organization will benefit.



Don’t feel your team has the tech capacity or expertise to strike the balance?

Explore industry resources for example, [Ask an Atlassian](#), [Atlassian Solution Grants](#), [Board.dev](#), [NTEN's tech readiness program](#).

About the report

306 nonprofit respondents out of 12,035

Work across the US, UK, Australia, India, Germany, and France

Mean age of 45 years

61% Small/Mid sized organizations

39% Large organizations (1000+ employees)

*Data on tech-focused, human-focused, or balanced was evaluated based on the 12,035 person sample to ensure statistical significance.

About us

Atlassian for Nonprofits, an [Atlassian Foundation](#) program, makes Atlassian apps and expertise accessible to social impact teams to help them achieve their missions.

Learn more about Atlassian for Nonprofits including [nonprofit discounts](#) and [support programs](#) at [atlassian.com/nonprofits](#).

Appendix



Nonprofit sector overview

53%

of nonprofit knowledge workers are using AI at least once a week

53%

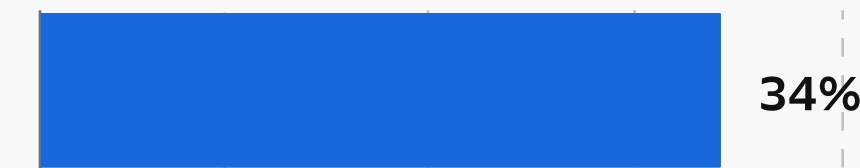
of nonprofit knowledge workers say AI makes their team work faster

8%

of nonprofit knowledge workers fully trust their AI tools to function reliably and as promised

What most gets in the way of effective collaboration between teams at nonprofits

Unclear or conflicting goals and priorities



No time or capacity to coordinate - everyone is in execution mode



Too many concurrent initiatives or shifting priorities



% of nonprofits selected among their top three

Nonprofit knowledge workers with extensive opportunity to...

Learn AI skills:



Experiment with AI:



Use AI for collaboration:



% of nonprofits selected

Role of AI for nonprofit knowledge workers

Teammate



Advisor



Assistant



Tool



Substitute



% of nonprofits selected

How nonprofit knowledge workers describe their team's AI culture

Celebrated



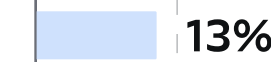
Encouraged



Neutral



Discouraged



Prohibited



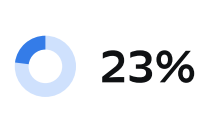
% of nonprofits selected

Primary challenges in getting value from AI

Lack of trust in AI outputs



Limited technical skills or training



Lack of understanding of AI capabilities or limitations

