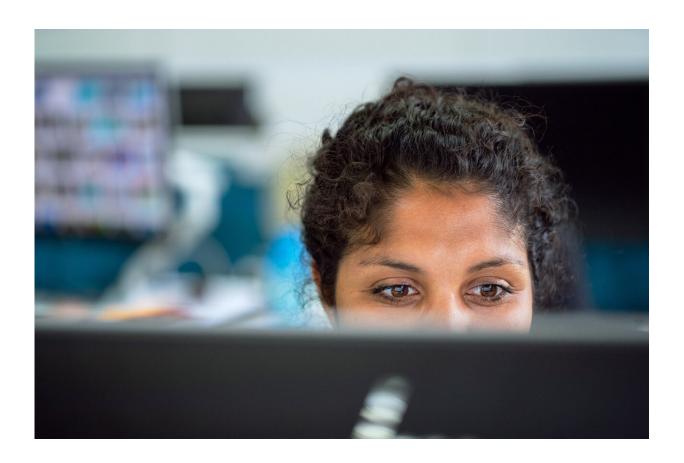# Women are less interested in AI than men, but using it would help them advance at work

August 12 2024, by Louise Champoux-Paillé and Anne-Marie Croteau

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Women use generative artificial intelligence tools less than men do.

The World Economic Forum recently published an article on the subject.

It reported that 59% of male workers aged between 18 and 65 use generative artificial intelligence at least once a week, compared with 51% of women. Among young people aged 18 to 25, the percentage of men using AI is 71%, compared with 59% of women. It's a difference of 12 percentage points, which is considerable.

In this area, as in so many others, you can see the glass as half empty or half full, depending on how optimistic you are.

Overwhelming statistics

Women are less likely to adopt this new technology. This is a worrying finding since, according to a study by Oxford Economics and Cognizant, 90% of jobs will be affected by generative AI by 2032. More specifically, between 2023 and 2032, the percentage of jobs with high exposure points to AI could increase sixfold, from 8% to 52%.

A Goldman Sachs report provides a more precise idea of this impact according to job type and gender. The Kenan Institute has established that nearly 80% of today's female workers are in jobs exposed to automation via generative AI, compared with 58% of men.

These jobs held by women that involve automation will not be replaced by artificial intelligence, per se, but by people who have mastered AI. At the moment, that means men. To reverse this trend, women are being urged to make efforts to redefine or increase their knowledge and skills in this area.

Another factor gives cause for even greater concern. According to a training expert on the Coursera platform, women are underrepresented in the development of AI-related skills. In fact, three times as many men as women sign up for the most popular AI training courses on this platform.

Part of the explanation may be that, according to a survey carried out by Cognizant, women are less convinced of the benefits of using artificial intelligence than men are. Women are less likely to think that generative AI will enable them to develop new skills (40% compared with 51% of men), change jobs (36% compared with 44%), create new opportunities (33% compared with 40%) or increase their income (35% compared with 42%).

Women are poorly represented in this sector of the future, according to the report by Québec's Conseil du statut de la femme (Council on the Status of Women) entitled "L'intelligence artificielle : des risques pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes" (Artificial intelligence: risks for gender equality). According to this document, of the 45,000 professional positions in digital intelligence listed for 2021 in Québec, barely 19% were filled by women. This is a damning statistic.

And then there's the matter of the low representation of women in senior management positions in the field of artificial intelligence. While we already deplore the fact that women are generally underrepresented in senior management in organizations, this phenomenon is apparently even more marked in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and consequently, in AI.

Opportunities for women

But let's change perspective now. If we identify the opportunities linked to artificial intelligence in tomorrow's world of work, we can see the glass as half full.

As we mentioned earlier, it's women's jobs that will be most affected by generative AI over the next few years. These fields will offer the best career opportunities for women if we find a way to take our place in them.

Thanks to the complementary perspectives and visions women bring to these male-dominated organizations, women can become agents of change in making these new technologies more inclusive. We could do this by better detecting the biases that influence the quality of the data produced by algorithms or amplify the discrimination inherent in our societies. This is in addition to the many other generally recognized benefits that a greater female presence brings to organizations.

This positive reading of the situation is not a pipe dream. It's based on the conclusions of a study carried out by professors Anahita Hajibabaei, Andrea Schiffauerova, and Ashkan Ebadi, who note a clear change in the situation over the last two decades.

In the words of Professor Louise Lafortune, co-author of the Manifesto for Women in STEM:

"Reaching 30% or 50% female representation in a field does not mean that all other issues have been solved. We have to continue to strive to ensure, among other things, the well-being of women in STEM workplaces, that organizations ensure the proper integration of women, and that women are encouraged to take on leadership roles. This is how women will have good careers in these highly rewarding fields."

A great deal of research has been carried out and published on the difficulties women encounter in male-dominated environments. Directly or indirectly, these articles argue in favor of a more inclusive organizational culture that better promotes female talent and women's progression within organizations.

With the support of the leaders of private and public organizations, women will have to adopt innovative and bold strategies to ensure that AI integration allows them to keep up their momentum, not hinder it, on the winding road to parity.

The challenges associated with the potential discrimination inherent in AI have an ethical character that needs to be further studied. Avoiding the harmful effects of AI will help make our society fairer.

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