



Think Tank

‘Women4AI Innovation Futures’

Insights

Chapter 1. Breaking the Barrier: Why Non-Technical Women Leaders Fear and Mistrust Gen AI?



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As generative AI (Gen AI) promises to revolutionize industries, many women leaders—particularly those from non-technical backgrounds—express serious doubts about and a lack of trust in these tools and systems. In conversations with the Think Tank Women4AI Innovation Futures, we explored why these barriers exist and how women can break through them. It appears to us to be both a technical challenge and a reflection of broader socio-cultural and organisational dynamics that need to be addressed.

Gen AI's Perceived Complexity: A Narrative of Exclusion

We believe that for many women leaders, the world of AI feels intimidating. The media often portrays Gen AI as a black box—filled with unknown algorithms, coding, and data science. This feeds into a broader societal narrative that frames technology as a male-dominated field requiring deep technical expertise. As a result, women leaders, especially those without STEM backgrounds, may feel under-qualified and excluded from engaging with this new technology. Yet the truth is quite different. Many Gen AI tools today (such as assistive agents) are actually designed for customised, non-technical use. However, while women are seldom exposed to role models successfully using Gen AI, there is a risk of perpetuating the belief that this new technology isn't for them. Until this narrative of exclusion changes, women will continue to feel like outsiders in a space they could otherwise shape and lead.

Impostor Syndrome: A Silent Barrier

Another pervasive challenge is the presence of impostor syndrome, a familiar enemy to female advancement, especially prevalent in spaces where women are underrepresented. Currently, as we know, fewer women than men have STEM backgrounds, so that even highly accomplished female leaders question their own competence when faced with fast evolving technologies such as Gen AI. However, technical expertise isn't the only requirement for the successful use and deployment of Gen AI - understanding and strategic thinking are equally important. We ask ‘why may women not be using Gen AI as much, despite being generally open to experimentation and creativity?’. We speculate that the issue may lie more in women not speaking up about or having opportunities to lead Gen AI initiatives, rather than in a lack of interest or capability.

Mistrust in Gen AI's Reliability: A Matter of Training and Education

We find that one of the most critical barriers to Gen AI adoption is mistrust. Women leaders seem doubtful of the accuracy and reliability of Gen AI outputs, particularly when the system's "hallucinations"—or errors—are visible. This mistrust isn't unfounded; many people have encountered inaccurate results from Gen AI tools. However, the issue lies not just in the technology itself, but the fact – often not well understood, especially by those who use it less - that Gen AI tools need to be trained and refined over time. When Gen AI produces inaccurate results, it's often because the user hasn't had the chance to properly train it. Many leaders expect Gen AI to work perfectly out of the box. In fact, without proper training, even the best Gen AI systems can produce inaccurate results. This expectation and education gap can lead to frustration, and generate the idea that Gen AI isn't worth the investment in time and energy.

To build trust, organisations need to invest in, but also reframe training programs, so that users understand how to effectively “teach” and customize Gen AI. We believe women should play a key role in shaping these more authentic Gen AI tools, helping to identify and share meaningful use cases, rather than feeling like passive users at the mercy of flawed “command and control” systems.

Ethical Concerns: Aligning Gen AI with Women's Leadership Values

For many women, leadership is rooted in empathy and purpose-driven decision-making. This often clashes with the perceived "black box" nature of Gen AI, which appears to drive decisions without human oversight or transparency. Women leaders may reasonably fear that Gen AI, as currently represented, could perpetuate existing biases or make unethical decisions, running directly counter to their commitment to fairness and inclusivity.

There is a growing concern that this version of Gen AI might undermine what women have worked so hard to build. There have been several high-profile cases where Gen AI systems have been found to reinforce gender and racial biases, making women rightly cautious about adopting these tools without clear ethical guidelines. We believe that women will be critically important in overcoming such biases. To do so, they need to get involved now.

Overcoming the Barriers

Our collective insights from Women4AIInnovation Futures point to three overarching themes about how women can overcome these doubts and build trust in Gen AI. First, there is a need for different, more accessible, non-technical education on Gen AI tools. Ongoing support, mentorship and encouragement to experiment within organisations is essential to building this confidence among non-technical female leaders.

Second, the visibility of women in Gen AI must be increased. Representation matters, and female leaders need to see others like themselves successfully shaping the Gen AI space.

Finally, organisations should invest in creating a culture that aligns Gen AI with ethical leadership and inclusivity as well as with business strategy. By fostering environments where Gen AI usage is demystified and made approachable, organisations can empower more women leaders to champion Gen AI initiatives. We contend that this will improve the outcomes for all.

Empowering Women to Lead the Gen AI Revolution

Gen AI can be a game-changer for women in leadership by offering adaptable, intelligent tools that align with business needs, helping leaders make smarter, faster, and more ethical decisions. By aligning AI with specific use cases, organisations can provide predictive intelligence and valuable content to augment leadership decisions. From assistive AI, which guides through recommendations, to fully autonomous systems capable of non-instructed actions, Gen AI empowers leaders at different levels. Unlike traditional rules-based automation, this advanced AI enables more dynamic and context-driven support, aligning better with typical female leadership styles and bringing the potential to transform how women lead in complex business environments.

We believe that women leaders bring unique strengths to the table—empathy, ethical leadership, and a focus on inclusivity—all of which are crucial as we navigate the complexities of Gen AI adoption. With the appropriate support, education, and ethical frameworks in place, women can overcome their mistrust of Gen AI, use it, shape it and lead with confidence.

The time for women leaders to break through these barriers is now. By embracing Gen AI and aligning it with their values, women leaders can shape the future of technology in ways that benefit everyone.

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Chapter 2. Female Leadership for Gen AI-Enabled Creativity and Collaboration: Transforming Team Resistance into Resilience



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For many leaders across industries a new challenge is emerging: how to convince teams and departments who may have well-established creativity and collaboration methods and be resistant to change—to embrace breakthrough Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) technology as an exciting and incremental new tool. Resistance may be persistent, likely rooted in fears of the unknown, of replacement, and of upending the familiar. Female leaders should be well equipped to guide these transitions with a human-centric approach. How can female leaders in particular, often possessing qualities of empathy, authenticity, and nuanced communication, turn resistance into resilience, showing their teams how GenAI is not a threat, but can be a valuable co-partner and ally for creativity and growth?

The Think Tank’s discussion highlighted that resistance often stems from a fear that Gen AI could disrupt familiar processes or even threaten the roles of those who rely on them. Female leaders should use empathy to encourage open, honest conversations and create an environment which empowers teams to express their fears, ensuring these are heard and understood rather than being dismissed.

Encouraging openness and experimentation

These fears are also often based on misconceptions, so if female leaders both embrace open criticism and encourage GenAI use and experimentation, this can help transform initial hesitation into curiosity and buy-in. Listening to team members’ reservations and thoughts about potential challenges can actively transform resistance into a constructive, collaborative approach, also enabling exploration of how GenAI could potentially improve existing processes. Teams which engage in testing and refining Gen AI applications will likely not only overcome the initial barrier of mistrust, but also provide a valuable source of innovation.

The power of practical case studies

Ongoing education through a tailored range of workshops, mentorship and training sessions can further demystify GenAI, showcasing its practical applications. Leaders can frame Gen AI as a supportive tool that aligns with existing skills, emphasising how it enhances rather than replaces human creativity. Sharing success stories from other organisations or early wins within their own teams showcases Gen AI’s potential in action, transforming abstract benefits into concrete examples. Leaders can take this “storytelling” approach further by encouraging their teams to visualize how Gen AI could shape upcoming projects and workflows, or even redefine roles in exciting and positive ways.

Tailoring GenAI to fit specific use cases and roles

Female leaders can demonstrate their commitment to Gen AI by integrating it into their own workflows and initiating role-specific pilots which require explorative use and collaboration across different departments. By adjusting GenAI implementation to meet specific team needs—whether in admin, tech, marketing, operations or management—leaders can address individual concerns, illustrate flexible applications of the technology, and enable teams to learn in a familiar working environment. This use case- and / or role-specific approach helps each group see how Gen AI fits into their work, making the adoption process smoother and more relevant. Influencing the impact of AI on future job roles and helping to shape these intelligently and creatively will be one of the most important responsibilities for female leaders. (Table).

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Approaches</i>	<i>The Way Forward</i>
<i>Resistance to Change</i>	Teams fear Gen AI may disrupt traditional and well known processes.	Acknowledge fears through empathy and open dialogue.	Create safe space for open expression, , experimentation and support.
<i>Lack of Knowledge and Skills</i>	Limited understanding of Gen AI fuels apprehension and resistance to adoption.	Conduct tailored workshops, mentorship and training to demystify Gen AI.	Encourage ongoing use, experimentation and innovation.
<i>Perception of Job Threat</i>	Employees worry that Gen AI will replace current roles, particularly in administration.	Reframe GenAI’s role as complementary, emphasizing role evolution and augmentation instead of redundancy.	Encourage participation in defining amended roles for growth and creativity.
<i>Loss of Established Methods</i>	Concerns arise over Gen AI upending familiar methods of ideation and collaboration.	Introduce Gen AI in a phased manner; tailor pilot programmes to specific teams to show relevance and value adding benefits	Pilot programmes tailored to team needs.
<i>Need for Trust and Buy-In</i>	Teams may distrust GenAI’s impact, feeling it lacks a human-centric approach.	Build trust via openness, collaboration, case studies and storytelling and transparency in implementation.	Inspire with success stories and encourage teams to visualize future GenAI use cases.
<i>Multidisciplinary Skill Gaps</i>	Adopting Gen AI requires skills that blend technical, creative, and strategic expertise.	Encourage cross-functional teams, skill-sharing workshops, and continuous experimentation	Build a culture of adaptability and collaboration, developing multidisciplinary skills.
<i>Need for Reshaped Roles</i>	Ensuring thoughtful and creative reshaping of roles, incorporating use of GenAI	Exert influence and provide input from direct usage / teams to shape new roles intelligently	Continually review, challenge and adapt as GenAI and working practices evolve.

Table. Transforming Team Resistance into Resilience: Challenges, Approaches and The Way Forward

In an era where Gen AI will rapidly reshape industries, female leaders have the opportunity—and responsibility—to lead with empathy, foster open dialogue, invite constructive criticism, and demonstrate Gen AI's value through example. In this way female leaders will not only actively shape and enhance Gen AI technology for the benefit of all—they will actually redefine modern leadership.

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Further Reading

[Boston Consulting Group \(2024\). GenAI: The diversity game changer we can't ignore.](#)

[Goldsmith, L. \(2024\). Why AI is the key to unlocking leadership opportunities for women. Financial Times, October, 24.](#)

[IBM \(2024\). Forging the future of AI: Women can take the lead](#)

[Jia N, Luo X, Fang Z, Liao C. \(2024\) When and how artificial intelligence augments employee creativity. Academy of Management Journal.;67\(1\):5-32.](#)

[Sakellariou E, Vecchiato R. \(2022\). Foresight, sensemaking, and new product development: Constructing meanings for the future. Technological Forecasting and Social Change.1;184:121945.](#)

[World Economic Forum. \(2024\). Why we must act now to revive women's leadership prospects in an AI-driven workplace.](#)