

# IRELAND SPOTLIGHT: AI CONFIDENCE, CAPABILITY AND CULTURE



**Irish businesses are operating in a paradox: strong headline growth and record employment, but also persistent pressure on costs and capacity.**

Energy, wages, insurance and compliance remain structurally high for many firms, while a deepening housing crisis and rising **living costs** are making it harder to **attract and retain talent** in key locations.

Against that backdrop, Ireland's labour market now employs around **2.8 million people**, with record high employment and one of the best educated talent pools in Europe. 63% of 25–34 year olds now hold a third level qualification compared with an EU average of 43%. It is perhaps unsurprising then that businesses in Ireland are well placed to use AI not just to drive efficiency, but to give skilled employees new ways to apply their expertise, develop careers and shape how technology is embedded in everyday work.

Our latest report, **The Grey Zone: The Untapped Advantage of AI Alignment**, surveyed leaders and employees across multiple sectors to explore how AI is reshaping the relationship between organisations, their people and the work they do. The research shines a light on the gap between AI adoption and genuine alignment – the 'Grey Zone' where technology exists but doesn't yet deliver its full potential value.

For Zellis, and our customers, AI alignment means ensuring that AI tools are built around the way people actually work – the tasks, schedules and priorities they face day-to-day. AI tools should support sound judgement, rather than becoming just another unused system.

**When organisations are clear that AI is there to inform judgement rather than replace it, confidence grows, capability follows and value is unlocked. Alignment turns AI from a source of uncertainty into a catalyst for better decisions, better work and more resilient workplace cultures.**



**STEVE ELCOCK**,  
Director of Product – AI  
Zellis

## AI ALIGNMENT ACROSS BUSINESSES IN IRELAND

Key statistics from the research highlight not only the adoption of AI in the workplace but also the cultural and commercial opportunities when leaders and employees across businesses are aligned:

- Employees embrace AI as a normal part of work**
  - Almost seven in ten (68%) Irish employees report that they use or interact with AI tools in their current role and the same number agree that AI improves the quality of their work – suggesting that Irish workplaces are turning AI from a “nice to have” into a normal part of how work gets done.
- Leaders show strong AI confidence**
  - More than four in five (84%) Irish leaders say they feel confident their organisation's senior leaders know how to use AI effectively and 86% agree it increases job satisfaction.
  - This leadership confidence matters: in the main report we see that where leaders are visibly confident and transparent about AI, employees are more likely to trust the technology and stay with their employer.
- High level of trust in responsible and ethical use of AI**
  - 67% of Irish employees agree that AI is being used responsibly and ethically in their organisation.
  - This higher level of trust aligns with the broader finding that transparent communication about how and why AI is used directly boosts both trust in leadership and intention to stay.
- Irish leaders expect significant cost and productivity gains**
  - More than a quarter (28%) of leaders in Ireland believe better aligned AI could unlock 7–10% in operating cost savings.
  - This optimism mirrors the wider research, where leaders and employees who already use AI say it can free up around 8% of working time for higher value activity when it is well aligned to how people actually work.

The combination of higher adoption, stronger trust and greater expected savings positions AI as a practical lever for resilience and growth, not just experimentation.

## OUR MISSION – SUPPORTING COMPLEX, SAFETY CRITICAL WORKFORCES

Zellis has a long history of working with organisations across Ireland, from public sector bodies to complex transport networks. One example is **Iarnród Éireann Irish Rail**, which moved from a 40 year old legacy system to a modern Zellis payroll platform serving more than 5,000 employees across a safety critical, 24/7 network. The transformation has delivered improved efficiency, better colleague service and greater visibility of hours and payments, with employees now able to input their own time and managers gaining clearer reporting to support decisions.

This kind of partnership illustrates what **human-centred payroll looks like in practice**: automation takes away manual timesheets and reconciliations, while people retain control over key decisions on schedules, pay and resourcing. As businesses in Ireland look to harness AI more fully, proven platforms, supported by local expertise and compliant with revenue requirements, will be critical to sustaining trust, accuracy and culture at scale.

Our mission is to help organisations make every moment at work count by connecting leadership vision, frontline experience and **AI-enabled technology** so that investments unlock both commercial and human value.

The research data shows AI adoption is proceeding at a healthy pace, with both leaders and employees on addressing its value. However, success depends on addressing workforce pressures, strengthening leadership communication, and ensuring AI implementations genuinely enhance rather than complicate the work.

Business leaders can make meaningful progress by focusing on four practical steps:

- **Put frontline voices at the centre:** pilot AI with representative offices/sites, create feedback loops with line managers and workers, and use workforce data to refine rollouts.
- **Target AI on the work that most people want to lose:** prioritise automation for scheduling, timesheets, quality reporting and compliance documentation.
- **Invest in skills and confidence:** tailor training to different generations and roles, positioning AI as an enabler of better work rather than a threat.
- **Measure what matters:** track safety metrics, quality indicators, worker pressure and retention alongside productivity and costs.

## CLOSING THE AI ALIGNMENT GAP

Organisations that align leadership ambition with frontline expectations and AI-enabled technology will be best placed to protect margins, retain talent and deliver standout operational performance in an increasingly challenging market.

Zellis invites leaders to explore how **AI-enabled HR, Workforce Management and Pay** can help close the alignment gap and realise the full value of AI across their organisations – turning grey into great.



## TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Learn more about the ways AI can unlimit what's next for your people and performance.

[Download the full report](#)

Our AI-enabled HR, Workforce Management and Pay platform is reshaping workplaces and our solutions pay one in seven people working in the UK and Ireland.

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WHAT'S  
NEXT**