

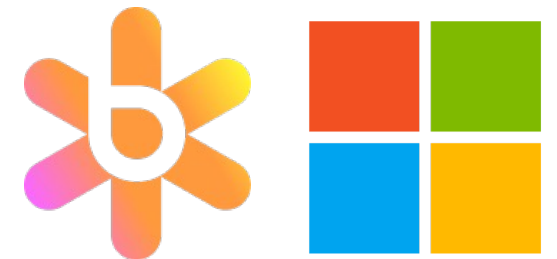
What makes a **great co-worker** *in an AI-native workplace?*

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Note: What do we mean by a “co-worker” in this talk?

A role in interdependent work!

It is not a claim about an AI’s personhood or standing.



Why this question, now?

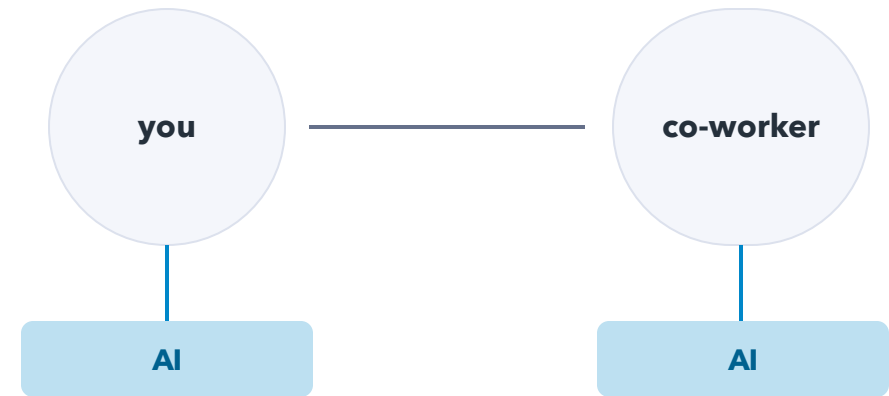
Knowledge work is increasingly interdependent, with people and with AI.

Then



VS

Now



You work with people & AI

Co-workers contribute judgment and work that your own work depends on. AI tools now contribute inside the same workflow.

You must build off the work that reaches you

Work produced by a person or an AI becomes part of what you must use.

Why care?

Answering this can help with three things.

The tools you use & build

AI design

What qualities should your AI co-worker have?

How should it adapt to the context, and the person in front of it?

The people you work with

Work design

When capable execution gets cheap, which qualities decide whether work goes to a person, a team, a tool or a mix?

The experience of co-work itself

Work etiquette

What work etiquette matters when people use AI to co-work with each other?

What we did?

A large-scale, mixed-methods empirical study involving 1,556 knowledge workers at Microsoft

RQ1 • Qualities – What qualities do knowledge workers value in a co-worker?

RQ2 • Priorities – Which qualities do they prioritize, contest or refuse, and how do they group into recognizable kinds of co-worker?

RQ3 • Variation – How do knowledge-worker characteristics relate to the kinds of co-worker they prioritize?

RQ4 • Work etiquette – What do knowledge workers expect of each other when a co-worker's AI-supported work reaches them?

Exploratory

22 interviews grounded in six decades of organizational psychology and HCI literature, asking for concrete episodes as "war stories" elicitation.

Confirmatory

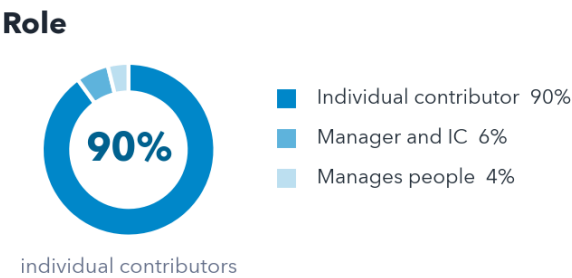
A survey of 1,534 knowledge workers: 732 answered about a human co-worker, 802 about an AI co-worker. Nobody answered both, so the sides are different respondents throughout.

Emerging - Work etiquette

Open-ended accounts in the interviews and the survey – 991 of them, on what a co-worker owes you when they use AI.

Who answered?

1,556 knowledge workers, across every kind of work.

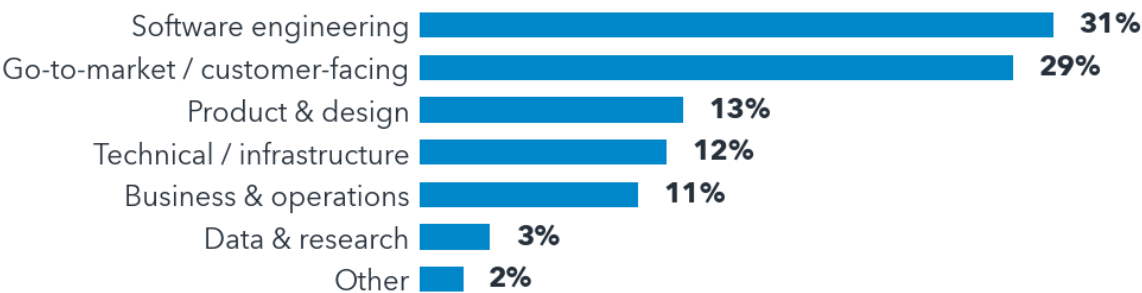


How often they use AI at work

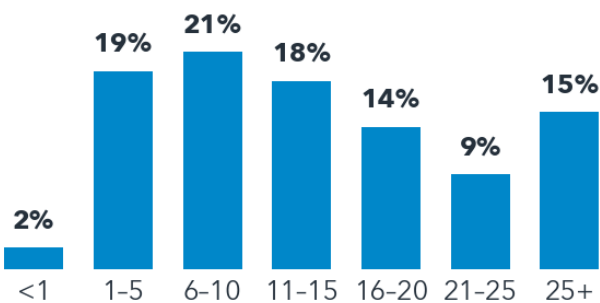


Discipline or function

7 groups, 23 disciplines

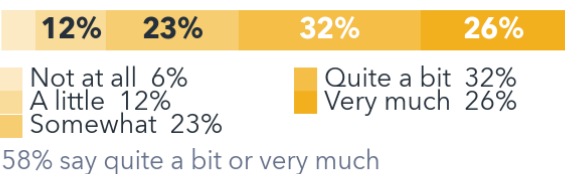


Years in the industry



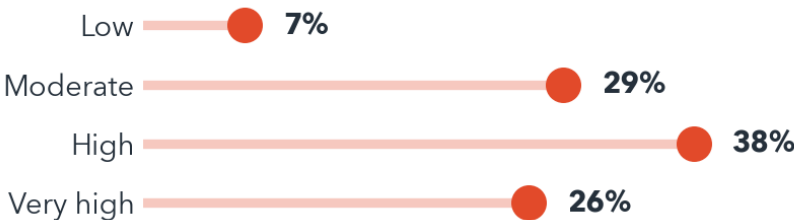
How far AI has felt like a co-worker

the 802 AI respondents



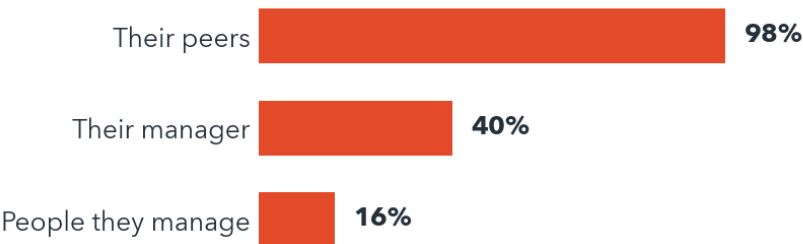
How far their work depends on other people

N=1,398 who answered it



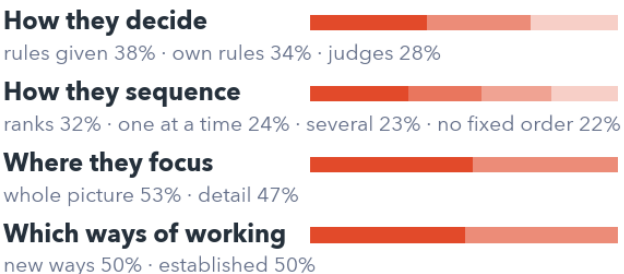
Who they pictured as the co-worker

select-all, so not out of 100



Thinking and working style

each dimension, of those who did not tie



What we found?

To explain what makes a great co-worker, we built the **BACI** framework in the exploratory phase

Benevolence

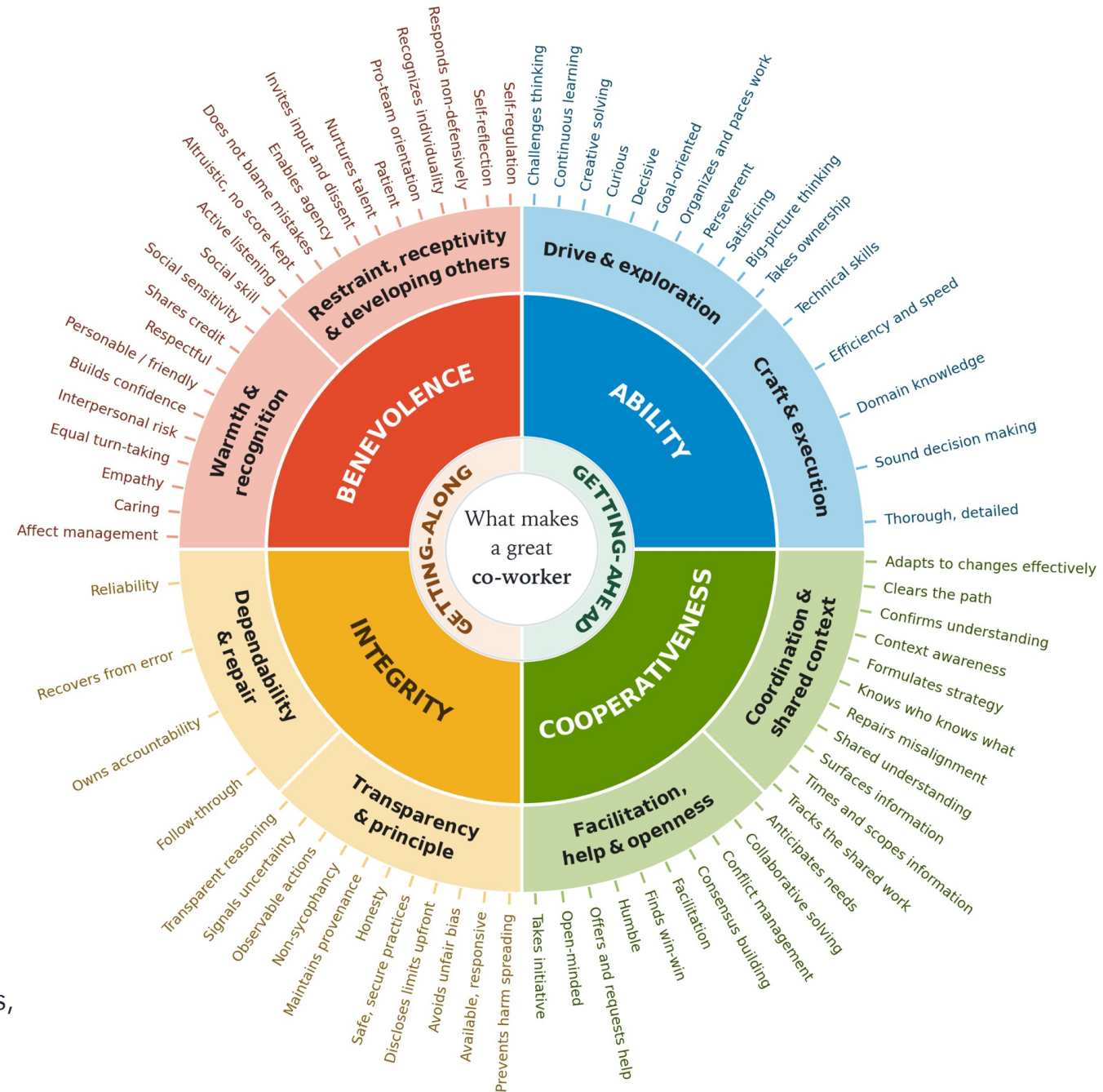
Ability

Cooperativeness

Integrity

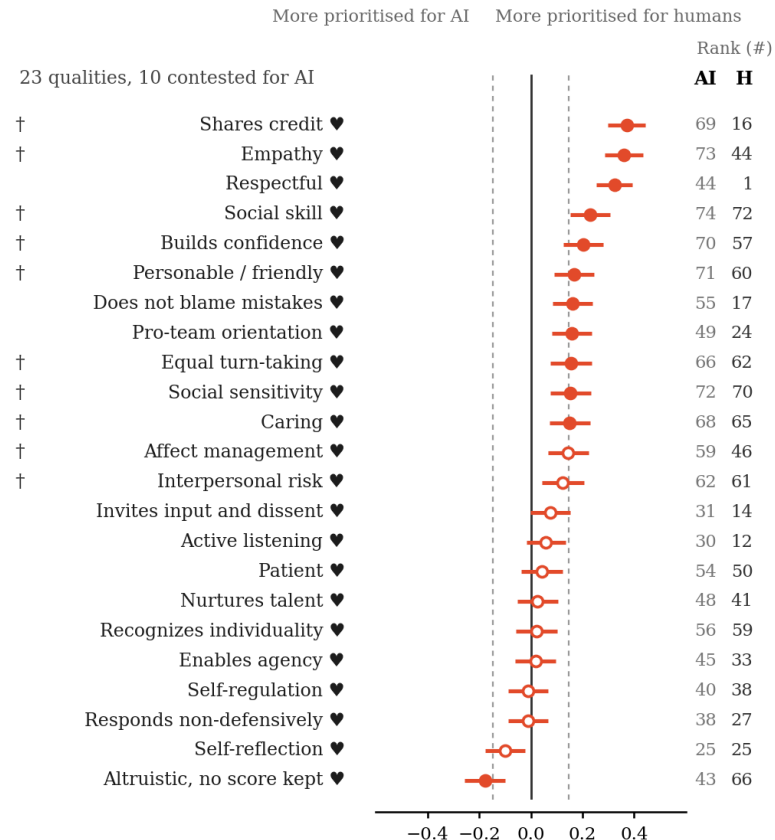
Each having two dimensions, encompassing 75 qualities of a great co-worker.

Each respondent rated 31-44 of them, covering 2/4 buckets, asked about how prevalent each quality is.



Benevolence • caring about people

Warmth leans human; restraint and receptivity sit close to even.



What matters more for a human

People want emotional warmth (e.g., empathy, respect, being credited) more from a human

What matters more for an AI

People prefer AI having the functional side of care (e.g., listening, being patient, altruistic)

What's contested

AI warmth divides people. Empathy, friendliness, social sensitivity can feel hollow coming from an AI.

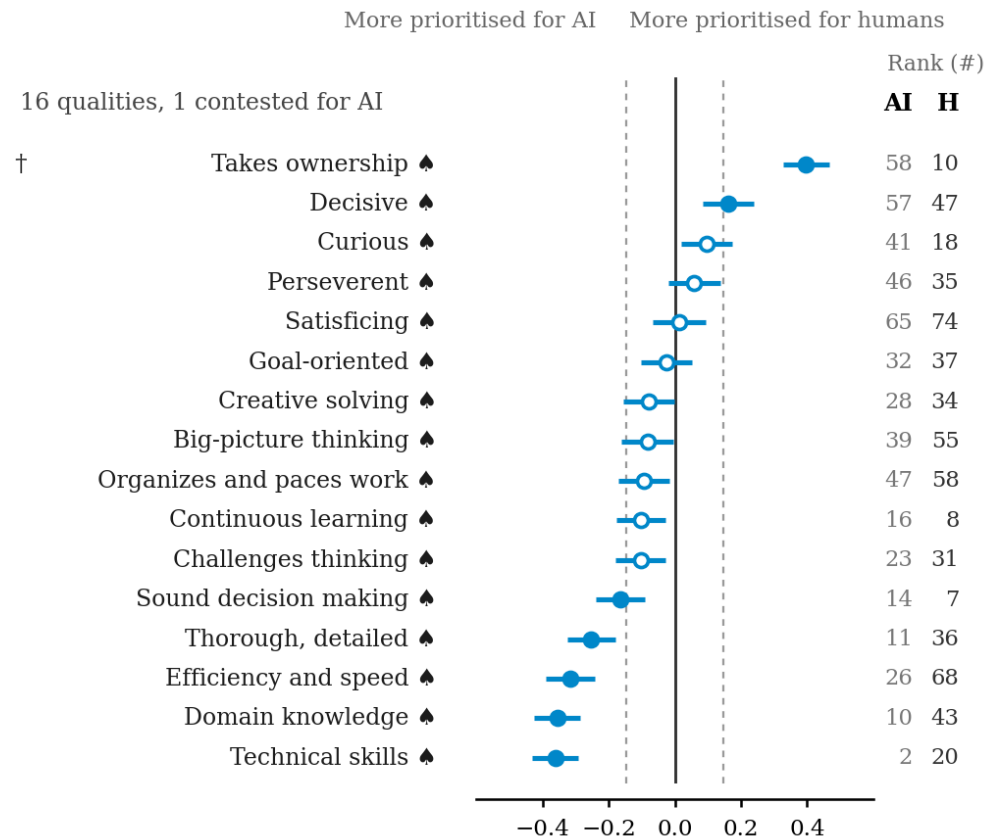
"if I'm going to AI because I'm sad, I want to be soothed and validated and empathized with."

P4 · Interview participant

AI care is contested where it implies feeling or social standing. Receptive behavior is broadly accepted.

Ability • being good at the work

Honing the craft moves to the tool; owning it does not.



What people keep for a human

Ownership and judgment: someone must choose, commit, and answer for it.

What people want from an AI

Hands-on execution: work fast, know the domain, catch the details, get the craft right.

What's contested

AI taking genuine ownership. It can do the work; it cannot carry the ownership for it.

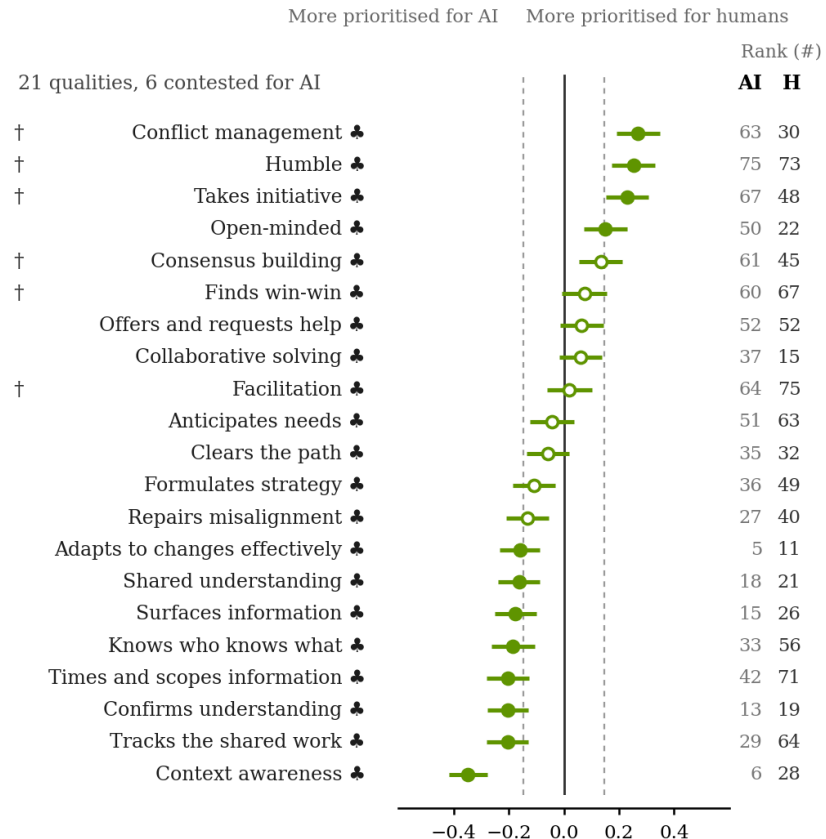
"I don't want the AI to take ownership of my work & think that it should guide decisions - that's my responsibility & where humans should differentiate our importance in creating great products."

P336-A · survey, AI referent

The hands-on execution of good work is fine to hand to AI. But owning the work – choosing what to do, committing to it, answering for it – people still want on a human.

Cooperativeness • moving the work together

People want the tool to hold context and keep the social coordination with a person.



What people keep for a human

Social coordination: manage conflict, build agreement, stay humble & open minded, take initiative.

What people want from an AI

Holding shared context: track the work, hold context, keep information current, confirm before acting.

What is contested

AI-led facilitation. Managing conflict, building consensus, or acting beyond what it was asked to do.

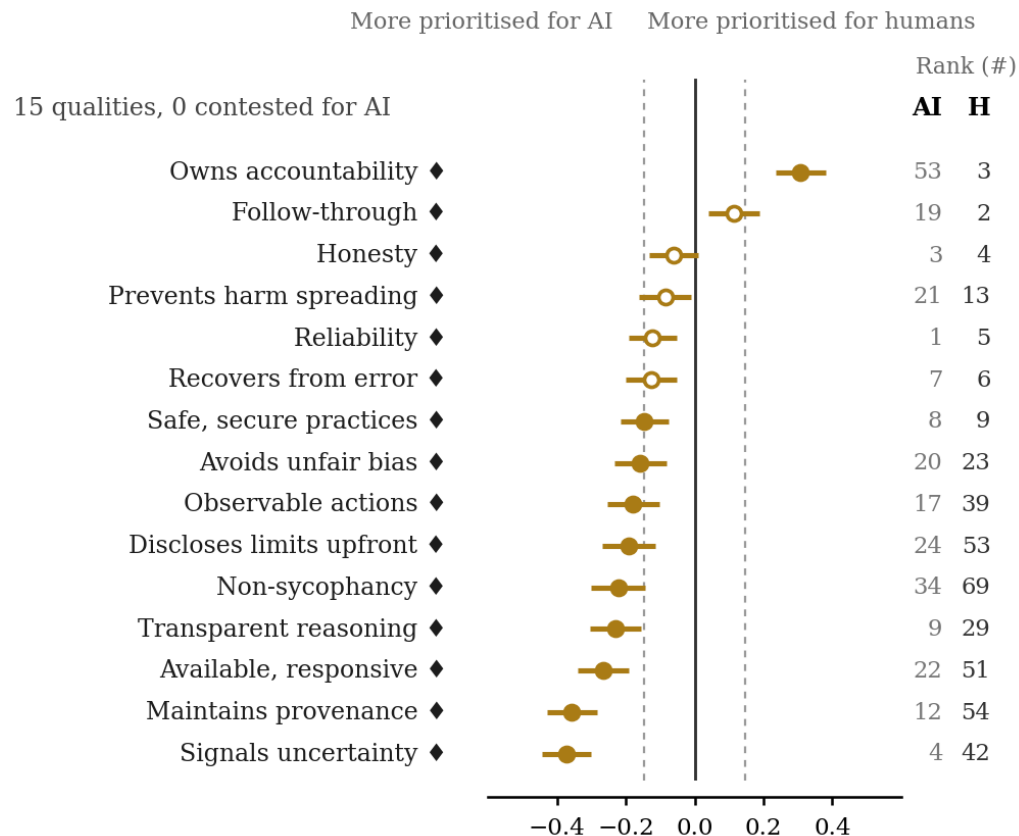
"Resolving data conflicts, sure. Managing conflicts involving people is absolutely something that must be owned and practiced by humans."

P58-A • survey, AI referent

People want AI to be the shared context.
Managing conflict, building consensus, taking initiative stays with a human.
Disputes cluster where AI stops supporting coordination and starts directing it.

Integrity • being dependable

People want dependability from the AI and accountability from a person.



What matters more for a human

Accountability: own the outcome, follow through, repair trust when the work fails.

What matters more for an AI

Legibility: show the sources, the reasoning, the limits – and do not be a sycophant.

What is contested

Nothing. The difference is in the emphasis.

"Nothing in this block felt detrimental. If I had to name a lower priority it'd be availability & responsiveness, being reachable & fast matters far less to me than being right & traceable."

P51-A · survey, AI referent

Both sides value dependable, transparent behavior.

People want a human to own accountability, while for AI, they most want it to show its work – sources, reasoning, limits, and flag when it's unsure.

How do the qualities group?

The four regions show which qualities people **RELATIVELY** prioritize for each kind of co-worker.



29

Asked of both

Shared priorities for a person and an AI.

9

Asked more of the person

Tied to human standing and answerability.

15

Asked more of the AI

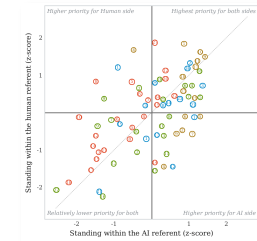
What makes a tool's work easier to inspect.

22

Asked less of both

Useful, but below each side's leading priorities.

The qualities group into 11 kinds of co-workers



Asked more of the person • 9 qualities, 2 kinds

- **Stand-Up Colleague** – owns the outcome, backs the team, shares the credit.
- **Perseverer** – owns it, sticks with it, stays open to input

Asked of both • 29 qualities, 4 kinds

- **Craftsperson** – does careful, thorough work and welcomes scrutiny.
- **Safe Pair of Hands** – delivers reliably and keeps everyone aligned.
- **Fair Dealer** – honest, own its mistakes, and fair.
- **Explorer** – curious, always learning, works it out with you.

Asked less of both • 22 qualities, 3 kinds

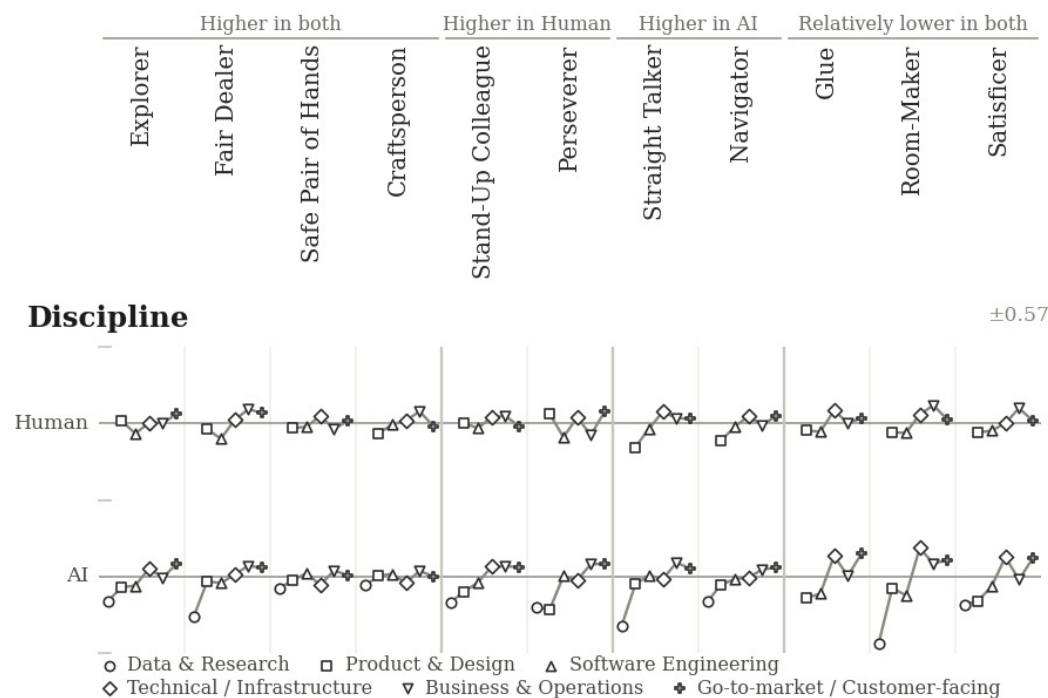
- **Glue** – keeps people connected and cared for.
- **Satisficer** – makes the good-enough call and asks for help.
- **Room-Maker** – sets the pace and makes space for everyone.

Asked more of the AI • 15 qualities, 2 kinds

- **Navigator** – maps the work, keeps it on track, flags what's unsure.
- **Straight Talker** – knows its stuff and says it straight.

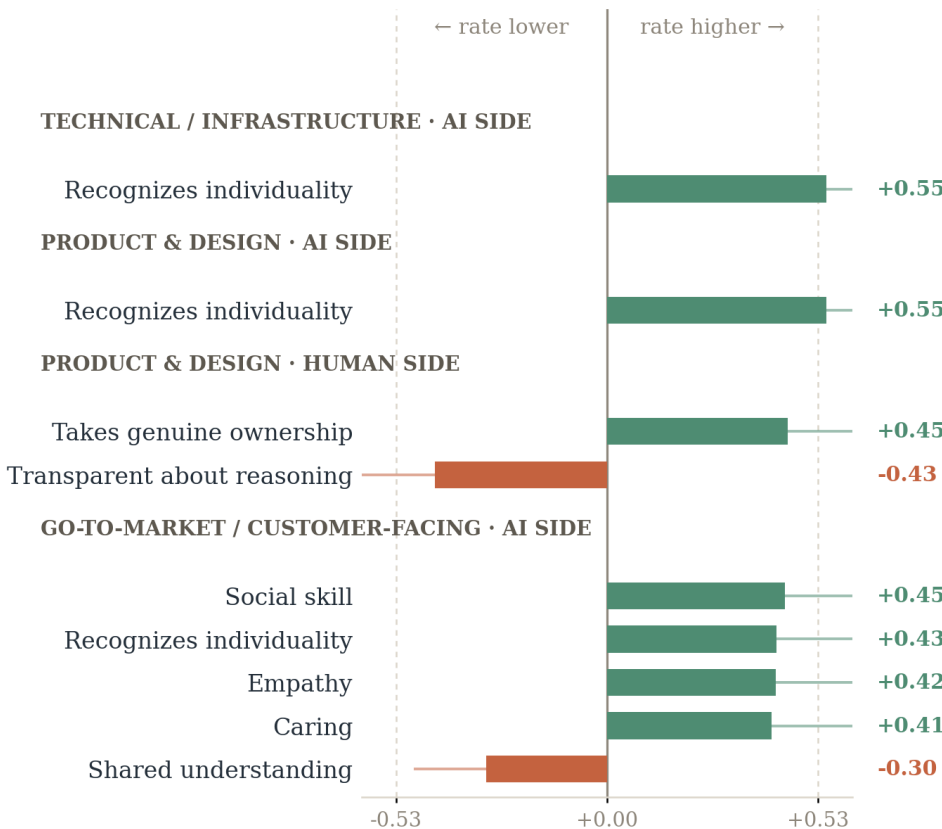
How do these priorities shift based on knowledge worker characteristics?

Discipline moves what people ask of their AI co-workers far more than what they ask of their human co-workers.



Customer-facing want more social skill, recognition and empathy from an AI

Technical and product want AI that recognizes individual skills & interests.



Baseline: software engineer. Green is rated higher than the baseline, rust lower.

Customer-facing want less shared understanding – they carry the context.

Product and design want less transparent reasoning from a colleague.

What else moved the priorities - 3 examples! and there is so much more!

How coupled the work is

Dependence raises what people want from their human-coworkers, not as much from AI.

AI: only the Craftsperson – careful work, open to challenge rises.

How far AI feels like a co-worker

The more it feels like a co-worker, the more warmth & benevolence people ask of it.

The Explorer, the Glue, the Satisficer and the Room-Maker rise most.

Detail, or the whole picture

Detail-first people hold human coworkers to a higher standard on nearly everything.

AI: only the Navigator – shows its working, keeps the work on course.

Fun trivia: People who considered their managers as coworkers wanted more of almost everything from their human co-workers (i.e., their managers).

Implications – Part1

What to build, and who the work goes to.

AI design

What every AI co-worker should lead with (top 5)

- **Safe Pair of Hands** – delivers reliably and keeps every[one/thing] aligned.
- **Straight Talker** – knows its stuff and straightforward (& non-sycophant).
- **Craftsperson** – does careful, thorough work, and welcomes scrutiny.
- **Fair Dealer** – honest, own its mistakes, and fair.
- **Navigator** – maps the work, keeps it on track, flags what's unsure.

And what to adapt on top

- Understand the person first: the context they are in now, how they think and work, what they are like.
- Infer from that which qualities they need above the core.
- Co-construct what they want to do next in that context, rather than deciding it for them.

Work design

What people ask of a human co-worker (top 5)

- **Explorer** – curious, always learning, works it out with you.
- **Stand-Up Colleague** – owns the outcomes, backs the team, shares credit.
- **Perseverer** – owns the challenge, sticks with it, stays open to input.
- **Fair Dealer** – honest, owns its mistakes, and fair.
- **Safe Pair of Hands** – delivers reliably and keeps every[one/thing] aligned.

And who the work goes to

- Name the qualities the task needs before you pick who does it.
- The tool can make the work verifiable. A person stays answerable for it.
- A feature in MS Teams could help inform who would be a good addition to a project/team, or who works the way you do.

What mattered beyond the qualities?

AI work etiquette: what a co-worker owes you when they use AI.

They might sound trivial, but there were 991 accounts of participants reporting experiences related to these 3 themes.

What is owed

- Read it before you send it.
- Fact check, please!
- Know it well enough to answer for it.
- Make the check fit the stakes.
- Say what AI did, and what you checked.

What it costs otherwise

- **Your saving becomes the reader's bill.**
- Unchecked or uncompressed output makes the recipient verify it, clean it and shorten it.
- Stock AI language makes care look absent, so trust in the sender falls.

Where the tool is barred

- Messages whose point is personal attention, relationship building, or investment.
- Profiling, ranking or evaluating co-workers, or ingesting their work without their knowledge.
- Confidential, customer, or security-sensitive data in unapproved tools.

"When humans send unreviewed AI content. If they didn't take the time to read it, why should I?"

P59-A · survey, AI referent

"I want messages to be handwritten, if you're asking me to do work, I want it to be your words and not an agent"

P153-H · survey, human referent

Implications – Part 2

AI work best practices, and an example mechanism.

Say what the AI did, what you checked, and what's still open.

Put those three on the work itself. A bare “AI-assisted” label leaves the reader guessing how much checking is left.

Only delegate work you could judge yourself.

Use AI where you could assess the output and step in when it fails, so the work never outruns the person sending it.

Stay answerable for anything that leaves your hands

Whoever sends the work can explain it and stands behind it, so “the AI did it” never becomes an excuse.

A handoff header that travels with the work.

COLLAPSED · DEFAULT

▶ HANDOFF | Accountable: M. Chen | State: DRAFT FOR REVIEW | UNVERIFIED: 1 item

ARTEFACT BODY
Release-readiness recommendation
Decision, rationale, and source notes

EXPANDED · OPEN

▼ HANDOFF | Accountable: M. Chen | State: DRAFT FOR REVIEW | UNVERIFIED: 1 item

OWNER AND ATTESTATION
A person passed over it · You can answer for it

Owner: Morgan Chen
Attestation: reviewed to the usual standard;
can explain and answer for it.

TOOL ROLE AND BOUNDARY
*Say the tool was involved · The context is your work
Keep it inside the rules · Some work is the relationship*

Used: organized the project-source comparison.
Barred: customer message and personnel review.
Boundary: public project material only.

VERIFICATION RECORD
It was checked, and it holds up · Who may do the checking, and how much

Checked: scope, cited sources, validation script.
By: Morgan Chen; automated link check recorded.
Depth: benchmark comparison remains open.

STATE AND OPEN QUESTIONS
Declare what you checked and what state it is in

State: draft for review.
Open: benchmark comparison is unverified.

WHAT THE RECIPIENT STILL NEEDS TO DO
Your saving is the reader's bill
Confirm the benchmark against its source, then decide whether the release plan can proceed.

ARTEFACT BODY
Release-readiness recommendation
Decision, rationale, and source notes

** Note: This is a conceptualization of what respondents demanded, not a practice they reported using nor a tested intervention.*

Takeaways

A "great" co-worker reduces the mutual cost of interdependence.

For a human, "greatness" is mostly *who they are*.

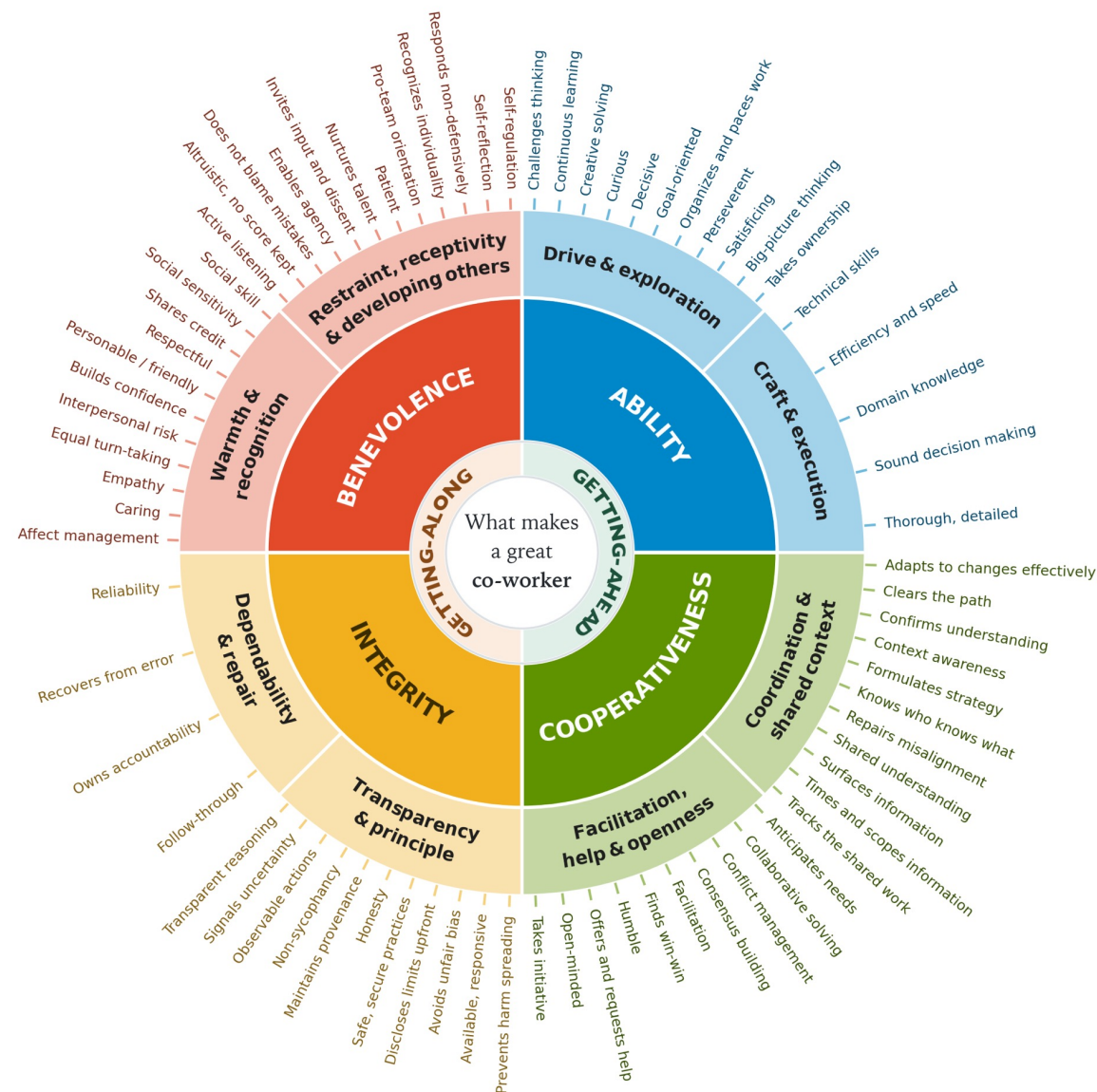
Accountability, ownership, credit, persistence – and the way somebody treats other people are the top 5 things asked of humans in an AI-native workplace. You hire and develop for these.

For an AI, "greatness" is mostly *designed*.

Straightforward; careful, thorough work; sustained alignment; maps the work, keeps things on track, flags what's unsure – build decisions, adapted to the person and the work.

Qualities are not the whole of it.

A capable human/AI can still be a difficult coworker if it violates the norms of collaboration



PAPER COMING SOON!

<https://aka.ms/design-cookbook>

[s/design-cookbook](#)

						Human Factors																				
						HF1 Gulf of Envisioning				HF2 Creativity Support and Ideation				HF3 Guidance and Feedback												
						HF4 Sensemaking				HF5 Judgment and Decision Making				HF6 Oversight												
						HF7 Metacognition				HF8 Appropriate Reliance				HF9 Bias and Fairness												
						HF10 Risk of Harm and Accountability				HF11 Effort and Cognitive Load				HF12 Skill and Self-Efficacy												
						HF13 Control and Agency				HF14 Perspective-Taking				HF15 Coordination and Equitable Participation												
						HF16 Social Perception (Mindset)				HF17 Privacy and Ownership				HF18 Personalization												
						HF19 Affect, Wellbeing and Connection				HF20 Accessibility				HF21 Spatial and Embodied Cognition												
						INTENT & CREATION			COMPREHENSION & JUDGMENT				TRUST, RELIANCE & RISK			EFFORT, SKILL & AGENCY			SOCIAL & RELATIONAL			EXPERIENCES				
SETTING THE CONTEXT	D01	Input, Context & Specification				251	288	104	282	207	141	172	101	23	47	503	383	351	209	31	53	170	204	185	73	72
	D02	Initiative & Intervention Timing				70	66	66	124	73	45	82	54	9	40	228	135	154	88	51	47	74	108	104	34	28
	D03	Constraints, Guardrails & Reserved Control				96	110	63	136	113	70	81	70	19	25	251	175	146	86	18	11	38	80	50	31	13
TAKING IN THE OUTPUT	D04	Modality, Embodiment & Rendering				126	133	73	219	131	93	102	88	8	54	345	257	192	129	26	75	109	198	159	92	126
	D05	Explanation, Inspection & Verification				153	146	59	246	231	205	102	135	35	47	357	238	253	150	19	23	74	74	49	33	18
ACTING ON THE OUTPUT	D06	Alternatives & Comparative Exploration				114	188	47	131	116	97	63	48	29	21	221	163	168	85	12	1	53	55	35	30	16
	D07	Artifact Editing & Revision				206	244	66	194	152	115	75	72	19	27	390	264	296	148	16	7	79	72	60	51	40
FITTING INTO THE WORK	D08	Workflow, History & Session Structure				158	167	88	172	136	94	146	77	29	43	304	285	223	136	37	31	95	149	116	48	42
	D09	Workspace Layout & Tool Integration				179	250	126	329	239	169	164	165	27	68	504	383	337	202	49	66	122	189	133	78	43
	D10	Agent Identity & Multi-Party Roles				63	76	78	109	81	61	152	64	24	45	203	219	155	170	83	96	105	200	185	56	35



Thank you – questions?

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