

AI Adoption and Shadow AI: End-user Experience, Policy Gaps, and the Path Forward

Employees and organizations alike are eager to tap into the power of AI to simplify work, boost productivity, and improve decision-making. Yet, as that enthusiasm spreads, a disconnect is becoming apparent between IT and end users. While many organizations are developing AI policies and guardrails as they deliver AI to users, the users themselves lack awareness of the policies and are prone to unsanctioned AI use (i.e., shadow AI).

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The Organizational Appetite for End-user AI

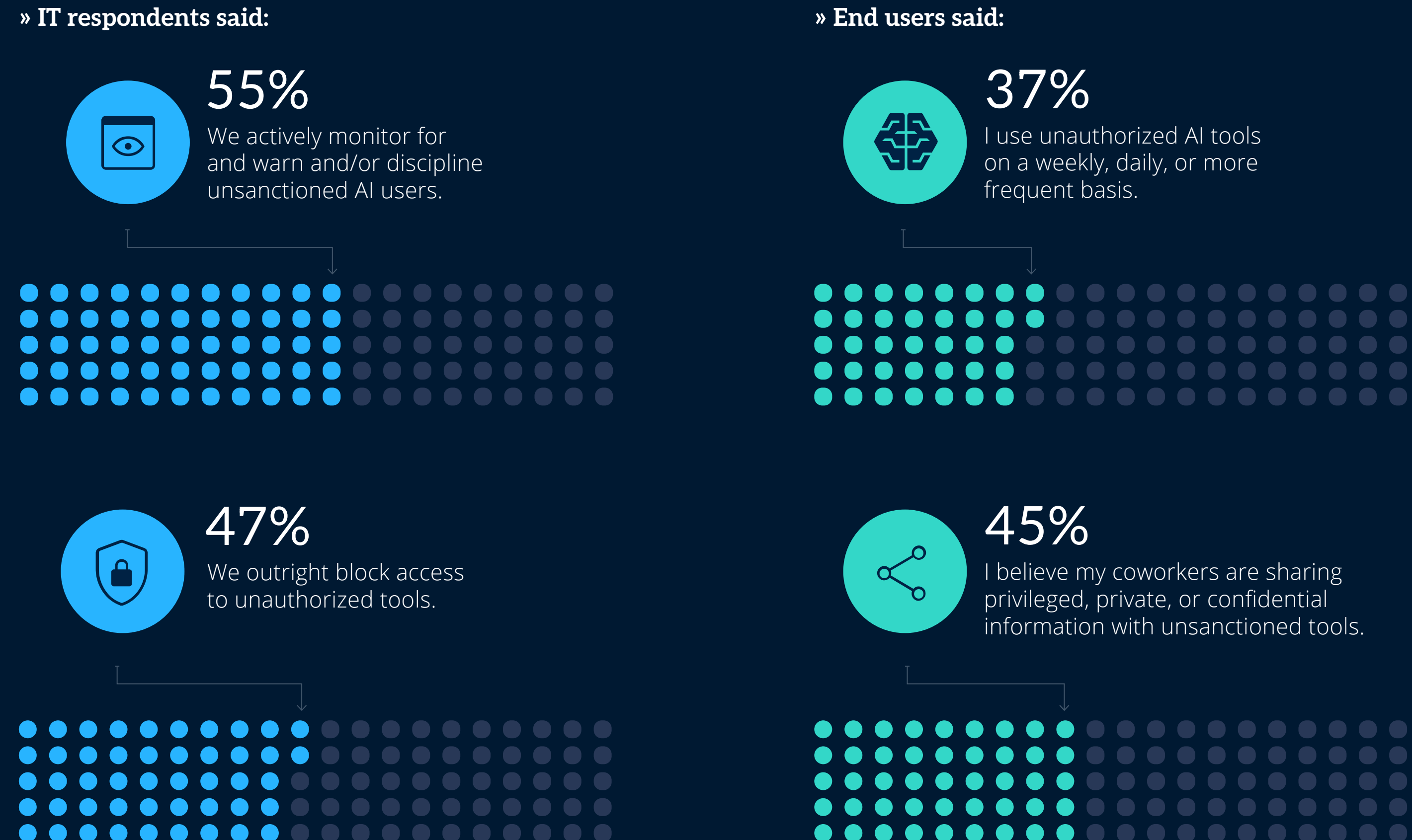
Organizations are already seeing real benefits from deploying AI to end users. More than half reported that AI is streamlining IT support through assistant-led self-service (56%) and improving the analysis of complex data (55%). Others cited higher-quality content (54%), better task organization (53%), and time savings from automation (50%). These early returns show that AI really is measurably changing how employees work and what they can accomplish. As organizations expand access, the challenge becomes maintaining these productivity gains while keeping usage secure, compliant, and aligned with enterprise policy.



Momentum Leads to Shadow AI

While the improvements are hard to ignore, not all usage happens within sanctioned boundaries. Enterprise Strategy Group research shows that 37% of corporate knowledge workers said they use unauthorized AI tools on a weekly or more often basis. Most concerning, however, is the 45% of end users that are believed by their coworkers to be sharing privileged, private, or confidential information with unsanctioned AI tools.

This is despite the majority of IT respondents having they actively monitor for shadow AI usage and issue warnings or take disciplinary actions. Additionally, 47% said they outright block unauthorized tools, which indicates a false sense of security given the widespread use of shadow AI.



Assumptions Don't Match Usage

The same can be said of AI usage policies. While nearly three-quarters (72%) of organizations have implemented AI usage policies, just 44% of end users said they are aware of their organization's policy.

Worse, while 53% of IT respondents said their oversight and enforcement of these policies is strict and consistent, just 36% of end users said the same.

Perhaps most concerning is that 30% of end users feel that IT entrusts them to adhere to policies with minimal oversight, compared to just 13% of IT respondents that report that practice.



Conclusion

There's reason for optimism. While IT and end users may differ in their awareness and enforcement of AI policies, most employees are eager to learn and want IT to do more to guide them. In fact, the majority said they'd abandon unsanctioned AI if their organizations provided approved tools that meet their needs.

The path forward is clear:



Only then can organizations minimize shadow AI and realize the full potential of AI in the hands of their end users.

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