



Survey of Microsoft XBOX Video Game Workers on AI Finds Concern about Impacts on Quality, Creativity, Job Security

Executive Summary

Workers in the video game industry are rapidly organizing unions to raise standards for wages and working conditions. In the age of generative artificial intelligence (GAI), workers are also organizing to protect human creativity and job quality from corrosive uses of digital technology aimed at deskilling jobs and squeezing workers harder, which also risk the quality of beloved videogame franchises. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) represents thousands of video game workers and is supporting workers at Microsoft XBOX who are bargaining first contracts. Artificial intelligence is one of workers' top issues in those negotiations, but Microsoft management is resisting workers' proposals to take a collaborative approach to AI adoption. CWA worked with researchers at Cornell University and Western University to survey video game workers about GAI and found:

- Game workers reported high levels of concern regarding the potential impacts of GAI on their job quality, the creativity of their work, the quality of games, longer term impacts on their studio, and broader ethical concerns.
- The issues of highest concern, with over 70% reporting they were 'extremely concerned', were ethical: concerns with AI stealing intellectual property and having a negative environmental impact.
- Regarding job security, a majority of workers expressed concern that AI would be used to replace some or all parts of their jobs, with 40% extremely concerned and another 20% moderately concerned.
- Among those respondents who use GAI, a majority agreed that it creates additional work correcting mistakes (59%), while 50% agreed that it makes work more stressful and 56% disagreed that it improves the quality of games.
- The majority of respondents who said that they did not use GAI reported the reasons being related to quality, accuracy, and ethical and copyright concerns, with over 60% of respondents listing each of these.
- Over 75% of respondents who have experienced management use of AI disagreed that it improves the transparency, quality, fairness, and efficiency of management decisions.
- Microsoft studio respondents were significantly more likely than workers at other video game companies to report risks of layoffs within the next two years driven specifically by automation and outsourcing. Over 54% of Microsoft workers felt that automation- or

outsourcing-related layoffs were somewhat or very likely, compared to less than 35% of workers at other studios.

- Regarding worker influence over use of GAI, Microsoft respondents reported less influence compared to non-Microsoft respondents. Only 27% of respondents from Microsoft studios reported having high levels of influence over how they used GAI tools in their work, compared to 42% from non-Microsoft studios.
- Workers' perception of their own influence over how AI is used at work was positively correlated with a more favorable experience with AI. Initial regression analysis found that workers who reported higher levels of overall voice and voice in AI decisions also reported significantly less burnout and more job satisfaction.

Workers are calling on Microsoft XBOX studios to follow its core principles on AI development and agree to union contract language that respects workers' critical role in assessing appropriate use cases for GAI. Microsoft XBOX leaders should embrace a high road approach to the development and implementation of GAI that centers workers and the quality of the games that they take such care to produce.

Introduction

Workers across the economy face corporate-driven AI deployment that reshapes their jobs and, in some cases, could displace them. In the video game industry, workers exist at the intersection of software engineering and content creation, placing them in the crosshairs of corporate applications of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) aimed at cost-savings in an inflation-constrained economy. As video game workers form labor unions at unprecedented rates, they have sought to bargain over the principles and practical implications of GAI in the workplace, with the goal of augmenting workers' contributions and improving the quality of the games they design and produce, while protecting against applications that could degrade job and product quality.

More than 3,500 workers at Microsoft XBOX studios have formed unions with the Communications Workers of America (CWA) since 2023 and most of them are still negotiating first contracts. One group of quality assurance workers at an XBOX studio has achieved a set of principles and limited protections related to GAI.¹ But the company has been resistant to agreeing to stronger contract language that would achieve real collaboration with their workforce over how AI is adopted.

This report presents the findings of a survey on the current state of GAI use in the making of video games and workers' views about its potential impacts. The survey shows that the video game industry is in early stages of adoption, but workers are very concerned about how GAI may be implemented based on what they have seen so far. Worker voice in determining appropriate uses for AI and worker discretion over the use AI in the work process are key factors in more positive experiences and willingness to adopt. Collective bargaining is a critical tool for democratic worker input to ensure AI is used in an ethical way that improves (rather than degrades) the quality of games and jobs.

Survey methodology

CWA collaborated with researchers at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations and at Western University to conduct a survey of 759 video game workers in the United States and Canada between March and June of 2026 regarding AI implementation. Full results of the survey will be published in the coming months. This preliminary report summarizes findings from respondents who identified their employer as a Microsoft XBOX studio (209 respondents) and those who identified their employer as a non-Microsoft studio (155) and excludes respondents who did not provide their employer. The Microsoft survey respondents are primarily CWA members across 18 bargaining units at XBOX studios. The non-Microsoft studio respondents

¹ CWA, press release, [Video Game Workers Reach Historic Tentative Contract Agreement with Microsoft](#), 5/30/2025.

work at a wide range of companies, from AAA studios to independents, reflecting the diversity found in United Video Game Workers (UVW-CWA), an industry-wide worker organization.

Survey findings

Of the Microsoft group, 46% reported some use generative AI (GAI). Among non-Microsoft respondents, 32% reported using GAI. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Microsoft respondents using AI have been using it for less than a year. Non-Microsoft studio respondents may be even newer to GAI, with 70% using GAI for less than a year.

The video game workers who reported active use of GAI are primarily software engineers and quality assurance testers, followed by game designers. For a breakdown of the types of uses of GAI by workers in these occupational groups, see Appendix.

Below we report worker responses to questions concerning different benefits and costs of AI use.

Worker concerns with generative AI: Job quality, game quality, studio impacts, ethics

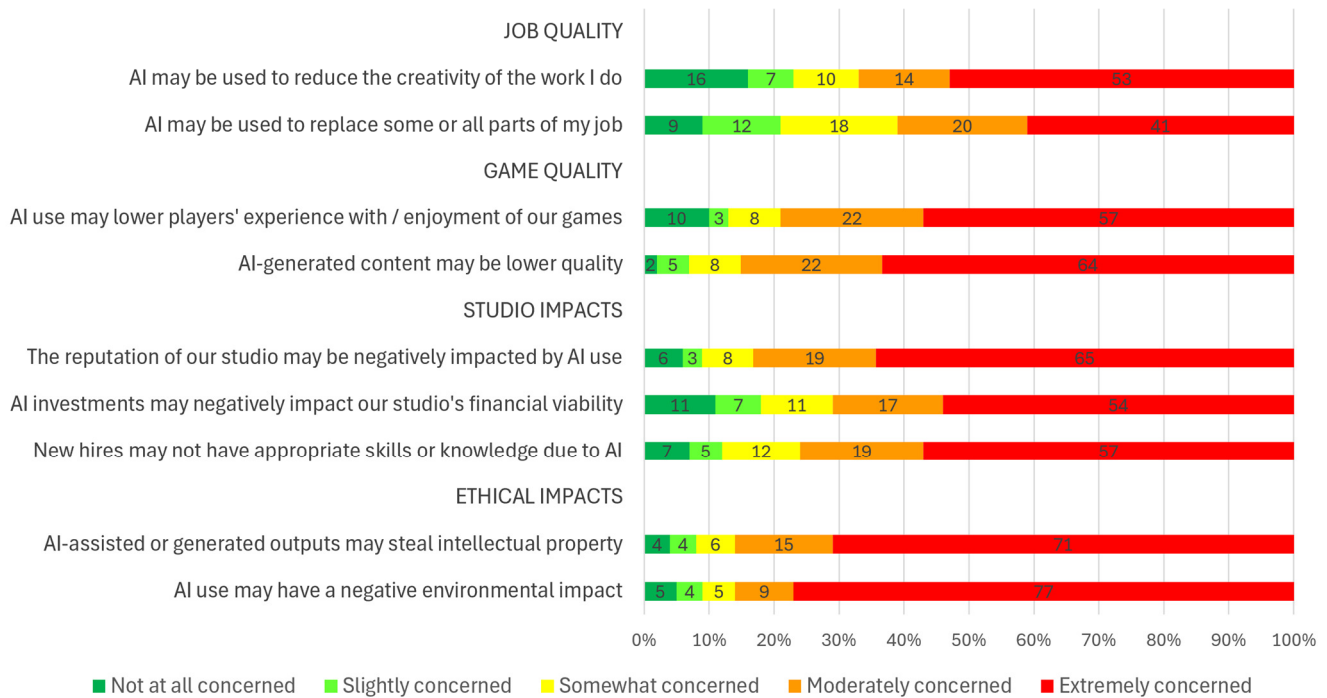
Game workers reported high levels of concern regarding the potential impacts of GAI on their jobs. We divide these concerns into four categories: **job quality, quality of games, longer term impacts on their studio, and broader ethical concerns**. For this set of survey questions, responses were similar between Microsoft and non-Microsoft studios, and so we report combined responses for both groups.

A majority of workers expressed concern that AI would be used **to replace some or all parts of their jobs**, with 40% extremely concerned and another 20% moderately concerned.

A majority of workers also reported being *extremely* concerned about several issues: 1) that AI would reduce the **creativity of their work**; 2) that AI would negatively impact the quality of games, including **players' experience with or enjoyment of games** and via the **lower quality of AI-generated content**; and 3) that AI would negatively impact their studio, including **the reputation of the studio**, its **financial viability**, and reductions in the **skills and knowledge of new hires**.

The issues of highest concern (with over 70% reporting they were 'extremely concerned') were ethical: concerns with AI stealing **intellectual property** and having a **negative environmental impact**.

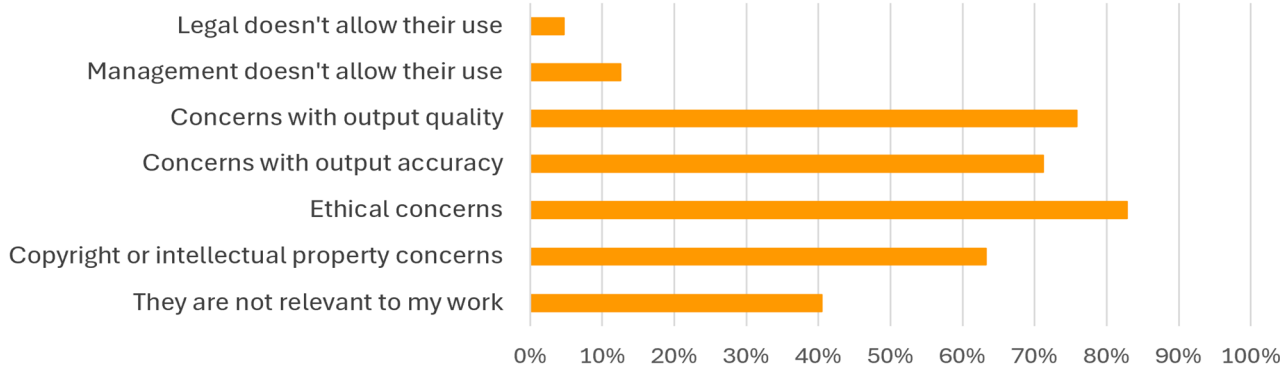
How concerned are you about the possible effects of GAI in your job?



Why workers don't use generative AI: Game quality and ethical concerns

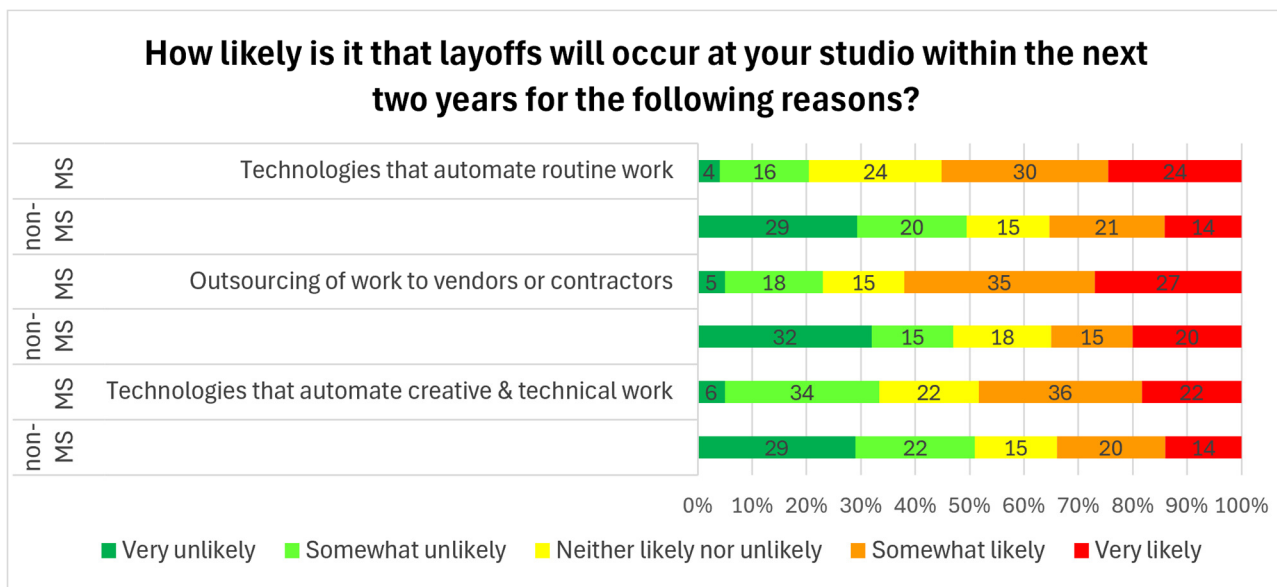
Game workers' strong concerns with **the impacts of AI on the quality of games and the ethics of game production** also came out in other responses. Respondents who said that they did not use GAI were asked why. The most common reasons were related to quality, accuracy, and ethical and copyright concerns, with over 60% of respondents listing each of these. Again, for this question responses were similar between Microsoft-owned and other studios, so we report the data together.

What are the reasons you don't use GAI tools?



Fears of layoffs

Respondents were asked about the likelihood that various factors could lead to layoffs at their studio. Here we found some differences between employer groups. Microsoft studio respondents seemed more secure in their own jobs; 46% said it was very or somewhat unlikely that they would lose their job in the next 12 months compared to 37% of non-Microsoft respondents. However, all Microsoft respondents answered the survey before the company announced 3,200 layoffs at XBOX. **Microsoft studio respondents were significantly more likely to report risks of layoffs within the next two years driven specifically by automation and outsourcing.** Over 54% of Microsoft workers felt that automation- or outsourcing-related layoffs were somewhat or very likely, compared to less than 35% of workers at other studios.

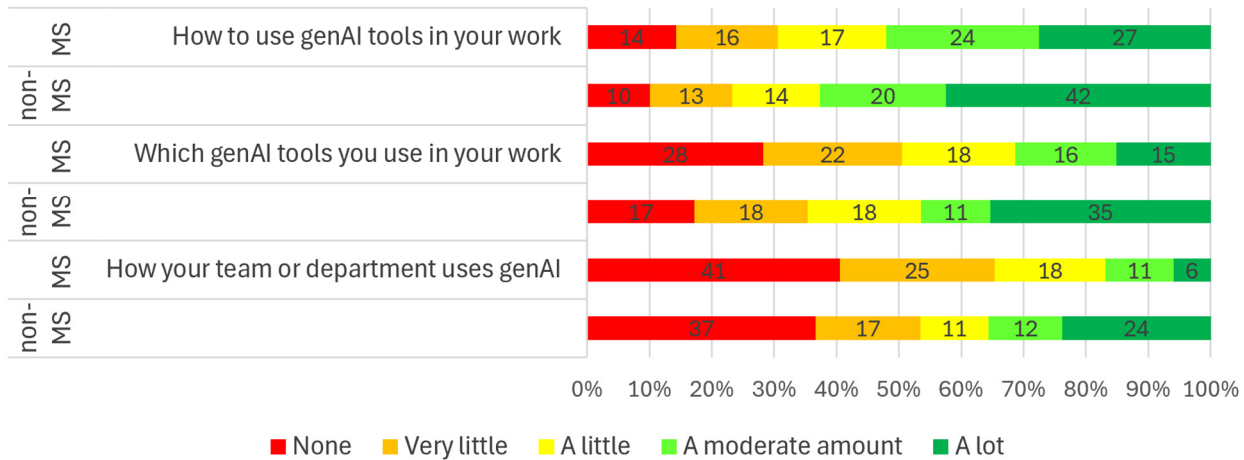


Worker control over how AI is used

Game workers' experience varies widely with respect to their ability to decide how they use GAI at work. Overall, survey respondents reported having the most influence over how they use GAI tools and the least over how their team or department uses AI, with more mixed responses concerning which GAI tools they use.

In all three categories, Microsoft respondents reported less influence compared to non-Microsoft respondents. Only 27% of respondents from Microsoft studios reported having high levels of influence over how they used GAI tools in their work, compared to 42% from non-Microsoft studios. A mere 15% of Microsoft respondents reported high influence over which GAI tools to use in their work, compared to 35% of non-Microsoft respondents. And a remarkably low 6% of Microsoft respondents reported having high influence over how their team or department uses GAI, compared to 24% of non-Microsoft respondents.

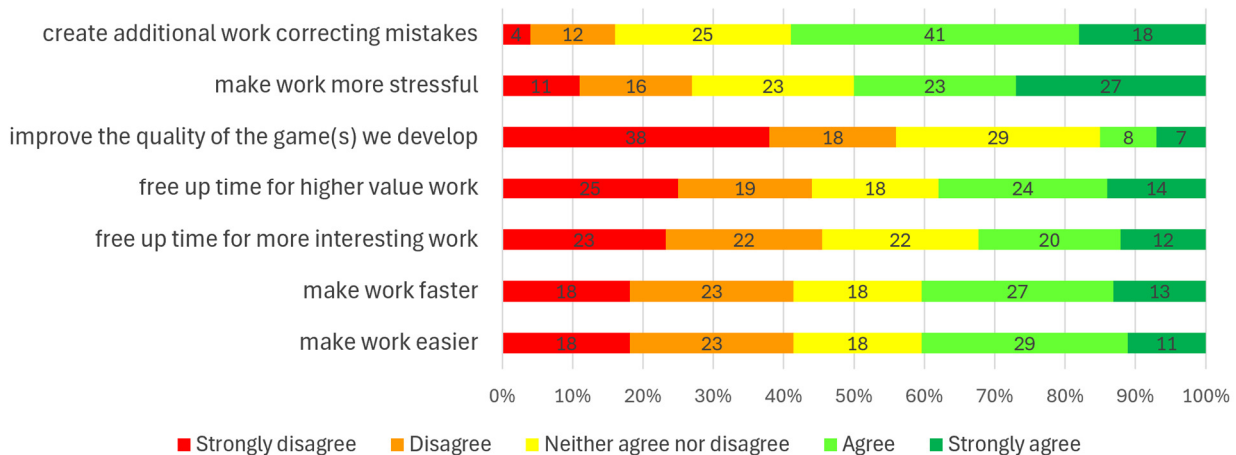
How much of a say or influence do you have on the following?



Benefits and costs of generative AI

We found only small differences in workers' experiences with the benefits and costs of GAI at Microsoft and non-Microsoft studios, and thus report findings together. Among those respondents who do use GAI, a majority agreed that it creates additional work correcting mistakes (59%), while 50% agreed that it makes work more stressful and 56% disagreed that it improves the quality of games. Slightly more respondents disagreed than agreed that GAI helps to free up time for higher value or more interesting work; however, the differences are small. Respondents are evenly divided on whether GAI makes work faster or easier.

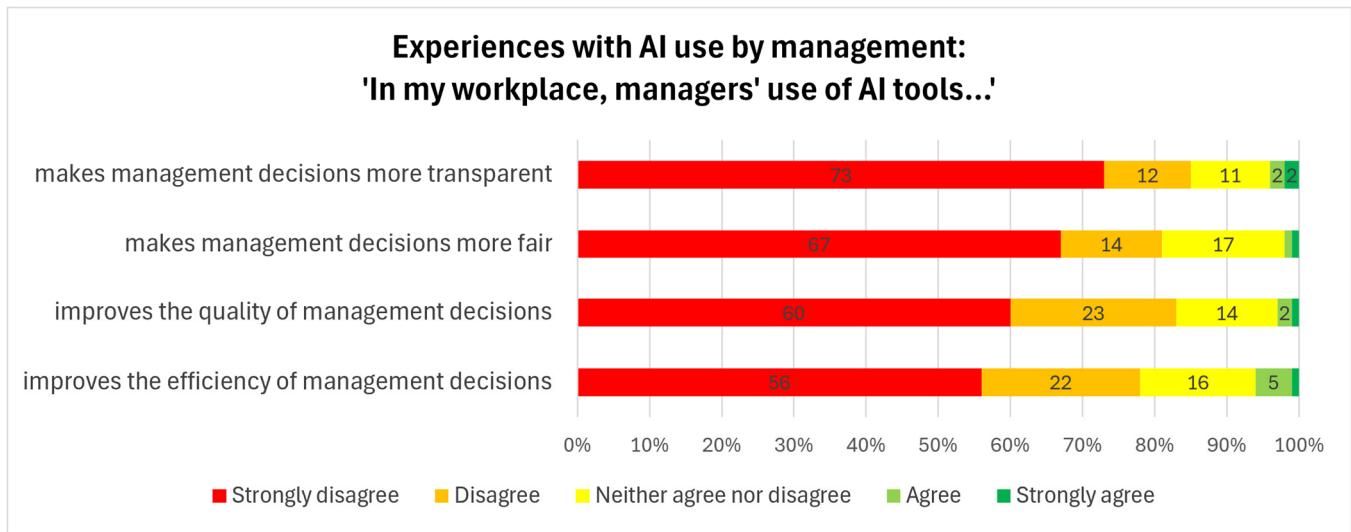
Worker experiences with GAI: 'In my job, generative AI tools...'



AI use in management

We asked game workers how their studio management used AI. The highest reported uses were for recruitment, performance reviews and feedback, and scheduling.

Seventy-five percent of respondents who have experienced management use of AI disagreed that it improves the transparency, quality, fairness, and efficiency of management decisions. These views were similar between Microsoft and non-Microsoft studios.



What drives negative or positive AI experiences? The role of worker voice

To better understand the variation between respondents' more negative or positive experiences with GAI and AI use in management, correlations were analyzed with variables measuring: a) influence over how they used AI tools in their work; and b) their voice or say in management decisions.

As described above, workers at Microsoft-owned studios reported lower levels of influence over AI use compared to non-Microsoft studios. In addition, 79% of respondents from Microsoft studios disagreed that workers have a lot of voice or say in management decisions in their workplace, while only 7% agreed. In contrast, at non-Microsoft studios, 63% disagreed and 25% agreed.

These differences in voice were associated with how workers experienced GAI. Perceived influence over how AI is used at work was significant and positively correlated with a more favorable experience with AI. Overall voice at work is also significantly and positively correlated with favorable experiences, although the association is slightly weaker. Since our data is cross-sectional from one point in time, these correlations suggest a relationship between these factors and AI use, but do not prove a cause and effect.

Using the full dataset, a regression analysis was conducted with controls for perceived job security, industry tenure, annual pay, and studio size. Preliminary findings show that game developers who feel they have a say in how AI is adopted reported more positive experiences with GAI technologies – i.e. they are more likely to agree that GAI improves the quality of games and makes work easier; and less likely to report that AI creates additional work correcting mistakes.

Workers who reported higher levels of overall voice and voice in AI decisions also reported significantly less burnout and more job satisfaction. Workers' overall voice at work had a larger association with workers' wellbeing than voice over AI, suggesting that giving workers broad voice in management decisions is connected to better outcomes. Furthermore, influence over GAI was related to agreement that AI improves game quality and makes work easier.

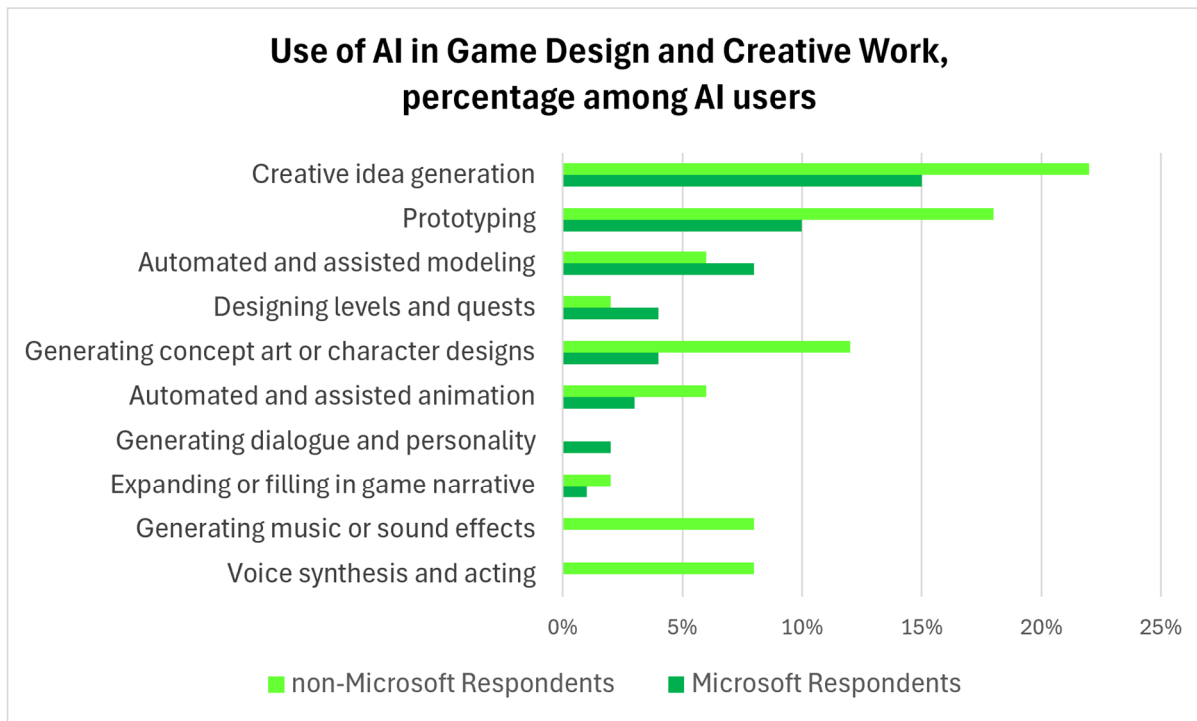
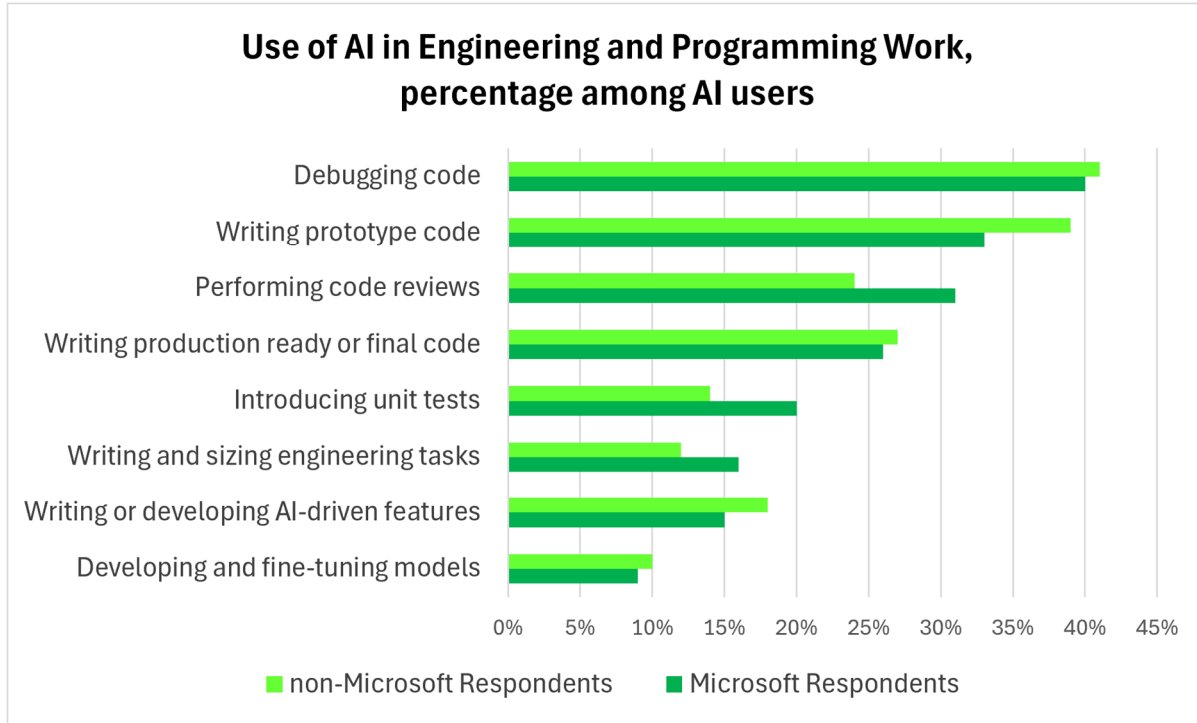
Conclusion

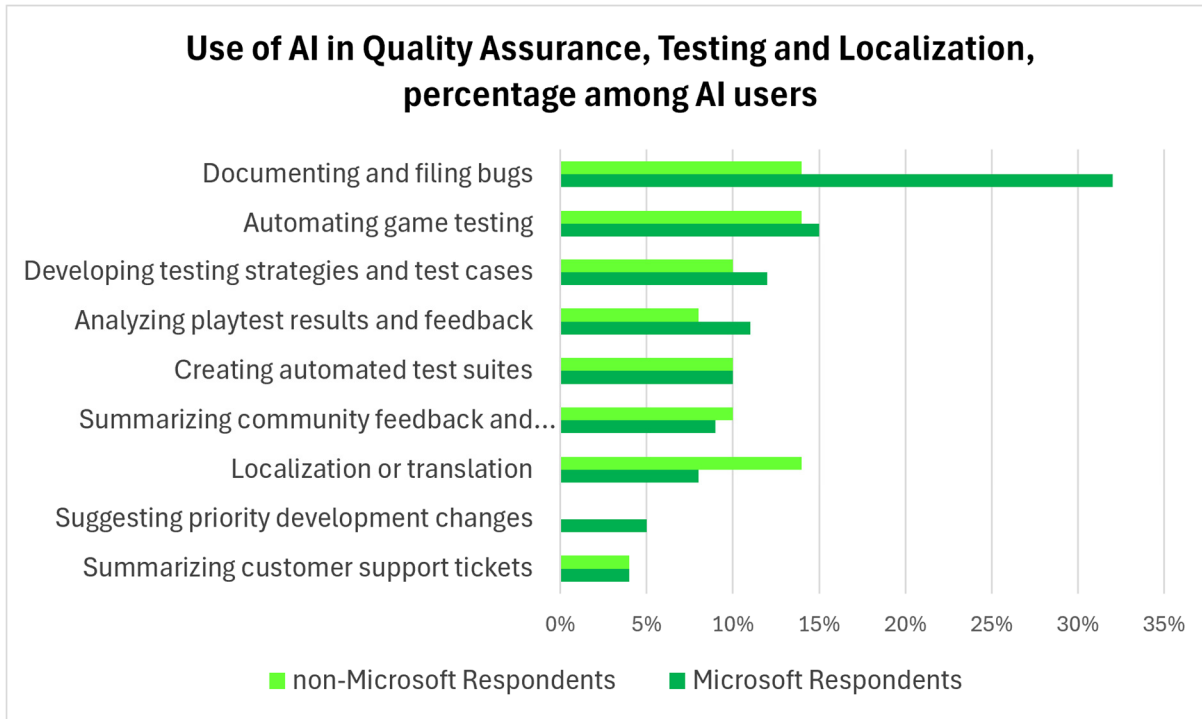
Workers in the video game industry are accustomed to technological change. They are not opposed to machine learning tools and other AI software that can supplement and enhance their capabilities in service to the creation of high-quality games. Yet, faced with increasing job insecurity, game workers express major concerns about the use of GAI and the broader universe of AI and other digital automation software in how they do their work, the management of their work and the evaluation of their performance.

According to our survey, game workers are very attuned to the broad ethical implications of GAI use, such as intellectual property rights and the toll on the environment. They also share deep worries about the negative impact of GAI on game quality. These are major drivers for why game workers do not use GAI in their work, for those who have a choice. They are looking for applications that fill a real need and reject the pursuit of ephemeral cost savings through overly broad or ill-advised automation.

Managers of game studios could attend to their talent and seize the opportunity to embrace a high road approach to the development and implementation of GAI that centers workers and the quality of the games that they take such care to produce. Unions play an important role in supporting worker voice and collectively negotiating agreements which can help drive better, more ethical and productive use of GAI. Though the survey results show higher concerns among Microsoft game workers in some areas, the company is well-placed to be a leader in this future. To start, Microsoft could follow its core principles on AI development and negotiate strong contract language with CWA to include worker voice in decisions about how to use technologies like GAI.

Appendix: Use of AI tools by occupational group





In addition to the above, though it was not a listed option, some respondents indicated that they were using GAI for administrative, information search and data analysis functions. Within this small sample Microsoft respondents reported using GAI for administrative tasks much more than non-Microsoft respondents (13% vs 4%); the other uses were similar (3-5%).