

DRAFT

Staff use of AI: is a blanket ban ever the answer?

By Stephen Almond

Who wouldn't like a couple of hours less work to get through this week? Space to cross a few more things off the 'to do' list, a chance to read that article you know is going to be valuable, or time to grab a long-promised coffee with a colleague.

It's appealing to us all. No wonder that a recent survey suggested half of workers who primarily work at a computer use personal AI tools.

[A BBC piece on the survey](#) featured people who found that AI freed up their time by helping them complete work quicker and more efficiently.

That puts businesses in an interesting position. Do you encourage staff to use AI, recognising the profound impact the technology is already having in workplaces round the world? Or do you move to ban AI tools outright, assessing the potential risks they carry as too great?

The answer, as is so often the case, is 'it depends'.

What is clear is that a blanket ban on generative AI in the workplace is unlikely to be effective in isolation. When AI offers people so many ways to work efficiently and effectively, a simple ban risks driving staff to use it under the radar, which brings clear risks.

A sensible starting point is to be proactive and consider AI tools employees may need, and how to provide them in a way that both complies with data protection obligations and meets business needs. Can your staff be provided with AI tools that help efficiency while also meeting organisational policies and data protection obligations?

Other organisations will need to take a different approach. For some, the benefits of employees using AI will be outweighed by the risks. But even there, a blanket ban is unlikely to be the answer in isolation. Consider supporting the approach you take with clear training on the risks employee using AI without oversight can bring, alongside deterrents to reduce temptation.

This is not a new challenge for businesses. For many decades companies have found ways to incorporate new technology into their daily lives in a way that is compliant and respectful of the rights and privacy of others.

At the ICO we have advice and guidance to help organisations use AI in a way that is lawful, transparent, and accountable. We have details of [questions to ask when developing generative AI systems](#), and next week will publish a blog on our website setting out some of the questions businesses should be asking when deciding whether AI could help their staff.