Digital Flows
EMPOWER YOUR WORKFORCES

PMO OF THE FUTURE · BENEFITS REALISATION

DIGITAL FLOWS INSIGHT · NOVEMBER 2026

AI saves time. **Who decides where it goes?**

Gartner's latest research shows AI frees capacity, but most organisations let it leak away. Freed time is a resource. Like budget and people, it needs an owner and a destination.



About one hour in five finds a purpose

What Gartner found

1

Time is freed, then lost

In a survey of 1,865 employees (2Q 2026), only 21% of the time AI freed up was redirected into more innovative work. Creating capacity is not the hard part. Using it is.

2

Productivity is not savings

Three-quarters of board members expect AI to bring productivity and cost savings. Yet 97% of organisations cannot reach the cost savings they want through productivity alone.

3

Cutting first backfires

Among 275 service leaders, 7% have already rehired after AI-driven cuts and 11% plan to. Gartner predicts 30% of employees replaced by AI will be rehired by 2029, often at a higher cost.

GARTNER SURVEY · 1,865 EMPLOYEES · 2Q 2026

21% of the time freed by AI was redirected into more innovative work.



21% redirected — 79% not redirected. Gartner does not say where it went.

"AI-generated capacity is a resource, not a return."

Grace Gstalder, Senior Specialist Analyst, Gartner, 4 November 2026

Read the numbers carefully

Four Gartner releases, several different groups of respondents. The board figure comes with no stated sample. The 30% is a prediction, not a measurement.

We quote each number on its own and never combine them.

Sources: Gartner press releases of 26 October (HR research, board expectations and freed time), 28 October (rehiring prediction), 4 November (CFO guidance) and 5 November 2026 (customer service survey). Page 1 of 2.

Treat freed time like **budget**

Nobody leaves a budget line unassigned. Freed capacity deserves the same: a destination, an owner and a review.

	Left to chance **The day decides.**	**Governed** **The organisation decides.**
Owner	Nobody in particular.	A named person in each team.
Destination	Wherever the day pulls: the inbox, one more meeting, the busiest person's backlog.	Two or three priority outcomes agreed in advance.
Measure	Hours saved.	Outcomes: backlog cleared, faster decisions, fewer escalations.
What leadership sees	A productivity claim nobody can check.	A line in the portfolio review, next to budget and people.

THE DIGITAL FLOWS PERSPECTIVE

Time saved is not time **gained**

When a team automates its weekly reporting, we ask one question: where did those hours go? Most of the time, nobody can answer. Not through lack of effort. Nobody decided what the hours were for, so the day decided instead.

PMOs already have the method. They allocate budget and people to priorities, then check what it delivered. Freed capacity is one more resource on that list: a structure question, not a tool question.

If you cannot say where the saved hours went, you did not save them. You spent them.

Start in four steps

1

Name the destination

Pick two or three outcomes: clear the risk backlog, bring a task in-house, decide faster.

2

Give it an owner

One person per team answers for where the freed time goes. Not the tool, not the vendor.

3

Make it a portfolio line

Add "capacity redirected" to the monthly portfolio review. In Smartsheet: one column, one widget.

4

Report outcomes

Not hours. Link each redirection to a measure: lead time, forecast accuracy, decisions on time.

Where does your saved time go?

Ask for a short capacity review. We map where automation and AI already free time, agree the destinations, and add the line to your portfolio review.

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The four steps adapt Gartner's three steps for CFOs (press release, 4 November 2026). The comparison and the perspective are Digital Flows' own. Page 2 of 2.

Structure before tools.