MIT MANAGEMENT SLOAN SCHOOL | IDEAS MADE TO MATTER

WORKFORCE INTELLIGENCE:

From MIT experts, strategies to transform skills, roles, and human potential across your organization.

CREDIT: ISRAEL VARGAS

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Letter From the Editor

If you're leading teams right now, you know that the biggest challenge as artificial intelligence reshapes industries isn't implementing the technology itself. It's developing the workforce that will ensure competitive advantage in this new era.

Here at MIT Sloan, our faculty members are studying how AI is transforming work in areas that matter to leaders — skills development, organizational design, and the jobs made resilient by uniquely human capabilities.

The five articles in this collection explore those capabilities and offer a process for identifying skills gaps and strategies for building human-AI collaboration. You'll discover why abilities like empathy, creativity, and judgment are becoming more valuable as AI advances.

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Sincerely,
Zach Church
Director, Editorial and Digital Content

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These human capabilities complement AI's shortcomings

by Brian Eastwood

Why It Matters

The work tasks that AI is least likely to replace are those that depend on uniquely human capacities, such as empathy, judgment, ethics, and hope.

What impact will AI and emerging technologies have on the U.S. labor force? Since the arrival of ChatGPT a little less than three years ago, such debates have typically fallen into one of two categories: ways AI can augment the workforce and ways AI-driven automation will disrupt the workforce.

A revealing paper from MIT Sloan postdoctoral associate Isabella Loaiza and professor Roberto Rigobon takes a different approach, asking, "What human capabilities complement AI's shortcomings?"

The approach shifts the discussion from disruption and labor substitution toward human abilities. "In the future-of-work field, the focus is often on machines and not humans," Loaiza said. "We wanted to focus on what humans can do. We don't want to instill fear in people's hearts. We wanted to show how AI is going to complement workers."

To answer their question, the researchers developed a framework of human-intensive capabilities that gave rise to three key metrics:

- A risk-of-substitution score.
- A potential-for-augmentation score.
- A score that indicates whether a task relies on certain human capabilities that AI lacks, among them ethics, creativity, and emotional intelligence.

The pair then applied each of these metrics to all U.S. tasks and occupations identified by O*NET, a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics database of occupational information that defines 19,000 asks across approximately 950 types of jobs.

Their conclusion? Work that is dependent on human characteristics such as empathy, judgment, and hope is less likely to be replaced by machines.

AI is impacting higher-skilled work

Technological advances have always sparked worker concerns, but advances in mechanization, automation, and digitalization have generally improved the quality of people's jobs over time. This may not be the case with artificial intelligence.

"AI feels different because it threatens to replace capabilities deeply connected to our cognitive ability," Loaiza and Rigobon write, noting that AI is capable of brainstorming, content creation, and problem-solving.

"AI has been moving faster, and the effects we see in the labor force are different," Loaiza said. "Previous waves of technology tended to negatively impact lower-skilled workers, while AI is impacting workers regardless of their education attainment."

That said, AI has its limitations. It cannot make inferences from small datasets or extrapolate far beyond a training dataset. Problems with more than two viable solutions, and decisions based on shared experiences, pose a challenge for AI as well.

And, critically, AI struggles with subjective beliefs — which the researchers characterize as decisions based on a range of outcomes that differ from what the data suggests. "Some of the most transformative decisions in human history have been driven by beliefs that defied the status quo, even when prevailing data appeared to support it," they write, citing women's suffrage and the civil rights movement as cases where conviction took precedent over the status quo.

"[Humans sometimes] make decisions not because the data tells us it's possible but because, out of principle, it should be done," Loaiza said.

Humans can still do things AI cannot

To begin their study, Loaiza and Rigobon outlined five groups of human capabilities, represented by the acronym EPOCH.

- **Empathy and emotional intelligence.** AI may be able to detect emotions, but humans can create a meaningful connection and share what the person is experiencing. Occupations such as social work and education illustrate this well.
- **Presence, networking, and connectedness.** Roles in nursing and journalism reflect the importance of physical presence in building connections, fostering innovation, and collaborating with colleagues.
- **Opinion, judgment, and ethics.** Humans can navigate open-ended systems, such as the legal profession and the science industry, whereas AI struggles to grasp concepts like accountability and responsibility.
- **Creativity and imagination.** Humor, improvisation, and "the visualization of possibilities beyond reality," as the researchers put it, remain uniquely human abilities. They are especially valuable in design work and scientific work.
- **Hope, vision, and leadership.** Grit, perseverance, and initiative further embody the human spirit. This means taking on a challenge despite long odds of success, such as starting a new company.

Armed with their framework, Loaiza and Rigobon used the O*NET data to study its nearly 19,000 work tasks in the context of automation and augmentation, and their relationship to human capabilities.

> *"If you're aiming for disruptive innovation or truly transformative business, humans have a huge role to play."*
>
> **ISABELLA LOAIZA**
> POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATE, MIT SLOAN

These so-called task statements are descriptive but specific to each occupation. That means that there is little overlap between different occupations' task descriptions, which makes it difficult to identify similar tasks distributed across different roles.

To overcome that limitation, Loaiza and Rigobon grouped the tasks into 750 clusters. One cluster, for example, consists of similar tasks associated with building sales websites in different occupations. Another comprises tasks associated with design review in fields as diverse as game design, engraving, and digital imaging.

The researchers then assigned each cluster of tasks three scores — the risk-of-automation score, the potential-for-augmentation score, and the EPOCH score, which indicates whether a task has related EPOCH capabilities that may protect it against automation. From there, they compared those results against an aggregate change of employment in the U.S. labor force from 2016 to 2024.

They found that tasks with a high risk of automation and/or augmentation came with a corresponding high risk of job loss. The automation-related findings reflect AI replacing human labor. As for augmentation, the decline in employment stems from an increase in productivity, meaning a firm can produce more without hiring additional workers. Augmentation isn't necessarily partial automation, Loaiza noted; it simply means that workers can either complete tasks more quickly than before or perform tasks they couldn't do before.

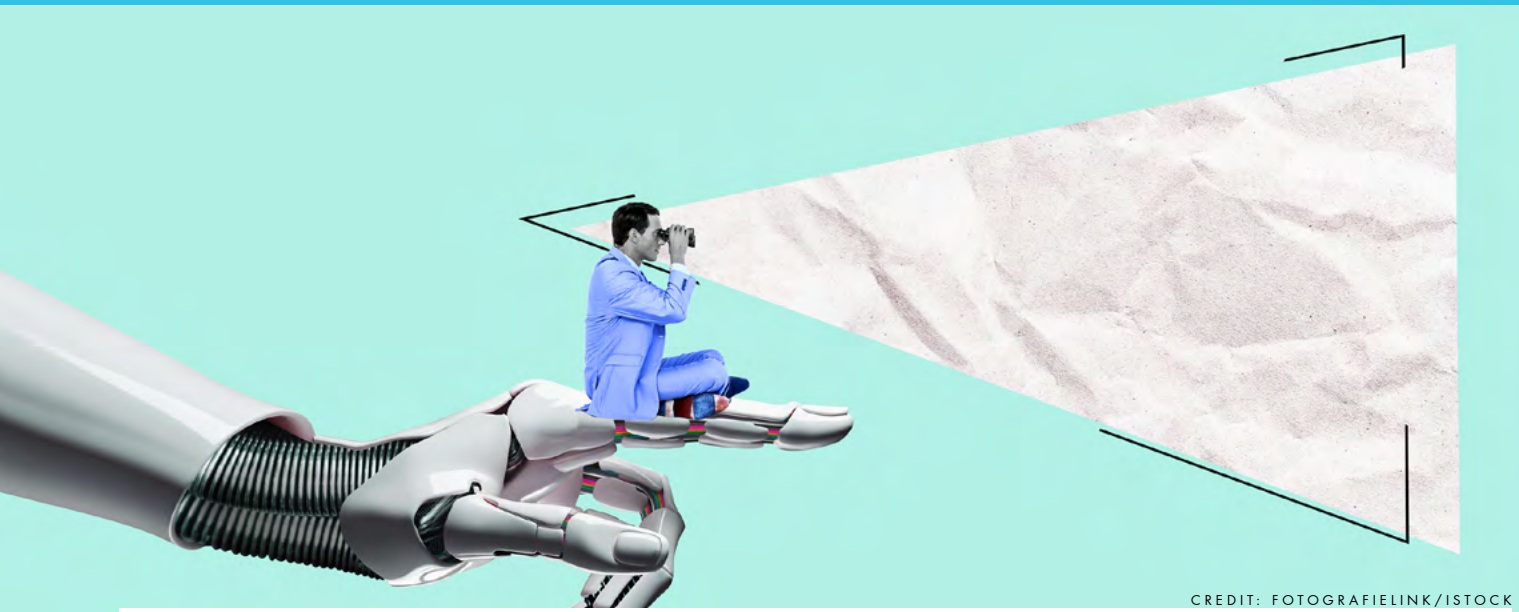
Human capabilities make a job more resilient

In contrast, all EPOCH capability groups were associated with employment growth, with the largest impact coming from the "hope" human capability and the second-largest from the "opinion" capability. These results, the researchers write, show a "shift towards a more human-intensive work not only in terms of the tasks performed in each occupation but also by the number of people employed in more human-intensive occupations."

The positive impact of human capabilities was a pleasant surprise to Loaiza, but not necessarily an unexpected one. "Especially in developed economies, there are a lot of top-level managers in decision-making roles" who do work associated with high EPOCH scores, she said. "There's a lot of value in human workers."

For Loaiza, the findings reinforce the notion that AI strategy must emphasize augmenting workers rather than replacing them. It also gives enterprise leaders a road map for upskilling workers — with particular attention paid to "the fundamental qualities of human nature," which are easy to overlook when training workers for a future driven by the use of AI.

"In a lot of fields workers can't be fully replaced," Loaiza said. "If you're aiming for disruptive innovation or truly transformative business, humans have a huge role to play."



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5 issues to consider as AI reshapes work

by Seb Murray

Why It Matters

Aligning equity and innovation isn't an easy task. Experts suggest engaging with workers and policymakers to do it successfully amid widespread AI adoption.

While artificial intelligence is changing industries at an unprecedented pace, it also threatens job security, raises questions about fairness, and could deepen inequality.

At a 2025 conference convened by the MIT Stone Center on Inequality and Shaping the Future of Work, a panel of experts discussed how technology is reshaping the relationship between employers, workers, and labor organizations.

"How do we make sure workers can embrace the wonder of this technology while we're also addressing the many big worries?" asked Molly Kinder, a fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Here are some of the speakers' ideas about how companies can balance innovation and job quality.

Consider which workers are affected by AI and what safeguards they have

The panel stressed the importance of intentional business choices that support long-term workforce stability.

Frida Polli, a visiting innovation scholar at MIT's Schwarzman College of Computing, emphasized that businesses have the power to determine how AI is used.

"How do firms decide whether they replace humans or augment them?" she asked. "That really is a leadership decision. I know that's super fuzzy, but at the end of the day, there is no policy that determines whether you decide to replace or whether you augment human beings."

Kinder pointed out that protection from AI's impacts is not evenly distributed across the workforce. In a case study about Hollywood writers going on strike in 2023 to protect their jobs from AI, Kinder noted that many other workers in the entertainment industry, such as freelance illustrators, voice actors, and independent filmmakers, are not part of a union like the Writers Guild of America and feel especially threatened by AI.

"The vast majority of workers in this country that are going to be impacted by this technology look more like those creatives than they do the Hollywood writers," Kinder said. She noted that some of the sectors most exposed to AI impacts, such as finance and insurance, also have low union density, leaving them more vulnerable to disruption and displacement.

Integrate worker input into AI adoption

Panelists stressed that companies should make AI decisions in coordination with those most affected by them.

"Workers' input early is critical. There's a world of difference between saying, 'OK, what can the front-line folks tell us about what problems we could solve and how this could improve their job quality?' versus just a pro forma coming to people and asking for their help in implementing something that is actually scary and intimidating," said Erin Kelly, a professor of work and organization studies at MIT Sloan.

Amanda Ballantyne, a visiting scholar at the MIT Stone Center and the former executive director of the AFL-CIO Technology Institute, said that workers are already experts on how technology affects their roles.

"They know what makes their jobs better, safer, more efficient [and] what makes their jobs worse, less fair, less safe — and everybody is leaving a lot of money on the table if we're not engaging them in a very serious way in the R&D process," Ballantyne said.

Early engagement with employees can lead to AI solutions that genuinely improve job quality and efficiency — and are more likely to be widely adopted. "We're not only creating better technology that will be better for society but [will] also have better labor market outcomes," Ballantyne said.

Increase transparency and fairness in hiring and promotion

Polli highlighted the potential for AI to both detect and correct bias in hiring, noting that this is possible only if businesses commit to transparency. While humans who make hiring decisions often leave no clear record of their fairness or bias, algorithmic systems do; the evidence can be found in the statistical relationships between different demographic groups when AI systems make hiring decisions.

Polli pointed out that this transparency offers an opportunity: Businesses can assess whether their hiring algorithms disproportionately favor one group over another and, if necessary, adjust them to be more equitable. She cautioned that this potential will be realized only if companies are willing to examine and disclose the results.

Engage proactively with policymakers to shape policies

Polli said that businesses should actively engage in creating AI regulations rather than waiting for government intervention, arguing that businesses should see regulation not as a threat to innovation but rather as a framework that can foster trust and improve outcomes.

She recalled her own experience lobbying for AI transparency laws, including a fair hiring law in New York City, noting that companies have the opportunity to shape regulations in ways that balance fairness with practical implementation.

"I always feel I have to beat the drum of 'regulation is not anti-innovation,'" she said, pointing to examples like the Fair Credit Reporting Act, which created clear guidelines for financial data use and ultimately helped the credit industry grow. She suggested that similar regulatory clarity for AI could provide businesses with both ethical safeguards and market stability.

The panelists suggested that partnerships between labor, industry, and policymakers can help ensure that AI is implemented in a way that benefits both workers and employers.

Ballantyne emphasized that many state governments are trying to figure out how to regulate AI and are open to input. This presents an opportunity for labor groups and businesses to step in and help shape policies that are practical and equitable.

Consider AI's impact on worker well-being

AI-driven job insecurity is more than an economic issue — it can have serious consequences for worker health as well.

"Unemployment is a health hazard," said Kelly. "We have known that since the 1920s." Job instability can lead to stress, anxiety, and lower productivity, ultimately harming both workers and businesses.

Kinder pointed out that AI could also reshape work in unexpected but damaging ways. Doctors and therapists, for example, could have AI handle the cases or parts of their jobs that are relatively easy. But "if all the easy cases are done by chatbots, maybe your workload is all the really extreme cases, and that's going to lead to burnout," she said.

Jobs are going to change, and "it's much more likely we're going to have equitable outcomes for workers if workers have a say in how that technology rolls out," Kinder said.

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How to use generative AI to augment your workforce

by Betsey Vereckey

Why It Matters

Tips for using generative artificial intelligence to help humans do their jobs better: Build out data infrastructure, incentivize workers, and define success.

With the right planning and a little experimentation, companies can use generative artificial intelligence to help their employees work smarter. Although it's possible that some positions will be replaced entirely by AI, the technology could end up creating new jobs and opportunities for collaboration between AI and humans.

At the 2025 World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, MIT Sloan professor Danielle Li joined a panel discussion about the opportunities and challenges of using AI to drive efficiency in the workplace. She talked about the need for businesses to define what they think success should look like, invest in data infrastructure, compensate their workers for lending their expertise, and much more.

Li discussed these topics with Aditya Bhasin, Bank of America's former chief technology and information officer; Jim Stratton, the senior vice president of technology and architecture at Workday; and Nitin Mittal, Deloitte's global AI leader. The panel was moderated by Andrew Hill, a senior business writer at the Financial Times.

Li, who studies how AI impacts the nature of work, offered four tips for companies experimenting with the technology.

> *"How do we move from an AI that's a genius to one that's capable within an organization?"*
>
> **DANIELLE LI**
> PROFESSOR, MIT SLOAN

Determine what AI success should look like at your company

Large language models like Claude and ChatGPT are smart and incredibly capable but require training to be useful, Li said. It's not unlike training a talented employee by giving feedback and guiding them with mentorship. Li said she sees proper model training as a top barrier to further AI adoption.

"How do we move from an AI that is a genius to one that's capable within an organization?" she said. One solution is for companies to build out their data infrastructure with lots of clear, labeled examples of what they think a good job looks like.

Bank of America has found success with its AI-powered virtual assistant, Erica, which provides more than 25 million customers a month with services, from conducting transactions to providing insights about how to manage their finances, Bhasin said.

Erica is a good example of using internal data to build a model to perform specific tasks, but a lot of companies haven't invested in the internal infrastructure to make that possible, Li said, adding, "I think that's a big challenge going forward."

Make investments in data infrastructure, and pool data across organizations

Mittal, Deloitte's AI leader, pointed to customer service, software engineering, and R&D assistance as areas where AI is fully stepping into roles normally filled by

humans, particularly when it comes to working in call centers, writing code, and testing software.

Li noted that all three areas have "a tremendous amount of often public, often fully pooled data" that can be used for predictive purposes and to build models and identify patterns.

"I think that a lot of the gains to AI development are going to be slow unless we make concerted investments in data infrastructure and understanding where [we can] get a large enough corpus of examples of people doing their jobs well," Li said. "You need examples, and you need those examples labeled properly."

Small companies might not have the same amount of in-house data that larger companies do. To compensate, they may have to buy external data, which might not accurately reflect their expertise.

"I think we need to think about ways of building data infrastructure that allow data to be pooled across organizations that might even be competing with each other," Li said. "We're not going to make progress unless we get some scale."

Incentivize your workforce to collaborate with AI

Employees may object to having their work or data used to train AI models without their consent or compensation. For example, a video recording of a teacher conducting a class may be helpful for students who are unable to attend in real time and want to watch it online later, Li said. In cases where the teacher does a good job, the recording could be added to a repertoire of training videos that could then be used to build models to do the same job. But this diminishes the teacher's expertise — why have teachers when you can just watch videos online?

"[Humans are] paid because expertise is rare," Li said. "The moment your expertise stops being rare, you stop getting paid."

Li said that companies should incentivize their employees to share their knowledge and work with the technology, or compensate them for doing so. As a result, employees would be more likely to want to be active stakeholders in the information-sharing process.

Determine what roles you want AI to be a substitute for, and contemplate what new jobs might be created

Li said that AI substitution is inevitable for some traditionally human-staffed positions or tasks, but wondered, "Is that a bad thing or not?" Imagine, for instance, a tired radiologist trying to read a patient's medical results in the middle of the night. In this case, having AI do the task might be the preferred route. "I think there's a difference between replacing jobs and replacing specific subtasks of roles," Li said.

Technology has also created new jobs and tasks, she said, pointing to areas like search engine optimization. "We have the agency to decide what we want some of those jobs to look like," Li said.

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The risk of letting junior professionals teach AI to senior colleagues

by Meredith Somers

Why It Matters

Generative AI's broad accessibility and applicability make it a vital tool for businesses — but those traits can also cause trouble when upskilling employees.

An MIT Sloan study on employee upskilling found that relying on junior workers to educate senior colleagues about emerging technology is no longer a sufficient way to share knowledge, particularly when it comes to the use of generative artificial intelligence.

Generative AI's characteristics — specifically, its broad accessibility and applicability — are what give the technology its advantages, said MIT Sloan professor Kate Kellogg, co-author of the paper "Don't Expect Juniors to Teach Senior Professionals to Use Generative AI: Emerging Technology Risks and Novice AI Risk Mitigation Tactics."

But those same features can also create traps for junior workers, preventing them from being a reliable source of expertise for more senior workers, despite an eagerness

to help. The reason: Rather than offering advice like the kind generative AI experts would share with users, junior professionals tend to recommend what Kellogg and her co-researchers call "novice AI risk mitigation tactics."

These novice tactics "are grounded in a lack of deep understanding of the emerging technology's capabilities, focus on change to human routines rather than system design, and focus on interventions at the project level rather than system deployer or ecosystem level," the researchers write.

While it's important for leaders to encourage enthusiasm in junior employees, "you are still the leader; you're responsible, you're accountable," said Warwick Business School professor Hila Lifshitz-Assaf. It's up to senior leaders to better understand how generative AI works and how to use it.

Lifshitz-Assaf and Kellogg are part of the multidisciplinary team of scholars behind the research and related paper. Their co-authors include Steven Randazzo of Harvard University; Ethan Mollick, SM '04, PhD '10, of the Wharton School; Fabrizio Dell'Acqua and Edward McFowland III of Harvard Business School; François Candelon, formerly of Boston Consulting Group; and Karim R. Lakhani of Harvard Business School.

The three traps

Tapping junior employees to teach senior employees about a new technology has worked well in the past, Kellogg said. Junior employees tend to be newer hires and are expected to experiment with tools and learn about their capabilities. Newer workers also don't have behavior ingrained around the older technologies that an organization uses.

But the speed at which generative AI is developing, as well as its expanding availability, is impacting that flow of knowledge between junior and senior workers, according to the research.

In July and August of 2023, the researchers interviewed 78 junior consultants after they'd participated in a field experiment in which they were given access to generative AI — in this case, GPT-4 — to solve a business problem (identifying channels and brands that would help a fictional retail apparel company improve revenue and profitability). The junior consultants had one to two years of experience, while senior employees were managers with five or more years of experience.

After participating in the experiment, the junior workers were asked these questions:

- Can you envision your use of generative AI creating any challenges in your collaboration with managers?
- What are some ways to deal with these challenges?
- How do you think these challenges could be mitigated?

Their answers revealed that junior professionals can fall into three traps that experts avoid when teaching and deploying AI. Those traps are:

- Lacking a deep understanding of generative AI's accuracy, explainability, and contextualization (meaning, are answers relevant and understandable?).
- Focusing on changes to human routines rather than to system design.
- Focusing on changes at the project level rather than at the deployer or ecosystem level.

For example, according to some of the anonymized answers recorded in the paper, the junior consultants tried to address generative AI's output inaccuracy by recommending that workers use AI to augment human-created material rather than using AI to create it from scratch. Generative AI experts, on the other hand, recommend that leaders decide appropriate use cases for the technology where "error risks are acceptable."

In another case, the surveyed juniors recommended changing human routines by training AI users to validate generated results. However, AI experts would be more inclined to use models that provide source links with the generated results.

The researchers offered a list of mitigation tactics to address these traps and recommended that corporate leaders ensure that junior and senior workers focus on addressing AI risks by understanding AI's capabilities and limitations, making changes to both system design and human routines, and "intervening in sociotechnical ecosystems, rather than only at the project level."

NOVICE AI RISK MITIGATION TACTICS

	Novice AI Risk Mitigation Tactics	Expert AI Risk Mitigation Tactics
GenAI capabilities	**Novices may lack deep understanding of GenAI**	**Experts are more likely to have deep understanding of GenAI**
Accuracy	• Use a standardized way of asking questions • Do the work first without GenAI	• Decide on appropriate use cases where error risks are acceptable • Test GenAI's reliability in executing each subtask
Explainability	• Explain model logic to managers • Agree on practices for explainable output	• Avoid GenAI use where high degree of explainability is required • GenAI provides illusion of transparency, but explanations may not match true actions
Contextualization	• Use for cases where contextualization is not necessary	• Provide contextual information, and specifiy the desired output • Use retrieval-augmented generation to add content

Credit: Kate Kellogg, et al., "Don't Expect Juniors to Teach Senior Professionals to Use Generative AI: Emerging Technology Risks and Novice AI Risk Mitigation Tactics" (2024).

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Lifshitz-Assaf said that while it's beneficial for companies to have junior workers who are excited about learning, "it's more a matter of waking up and shaking the leaders that right now are over-trusting the juniors and their ability to know what's right."

"You need to be focused on system design and firm-level and ecosystem-level things," Kellogg said of organization leaders. "Make sure that this isn't just about offering trainings but focusing on system design, pushing back with vendors, and putting things in place around data."

CREDIT: MARUCO/SHUTTERSTOCK

How companies can use AI to find and close skills gaps

by Brian Eastwood

Why It Matters

To train employees on digital skills, companies need precise insight into current workforce skills. Artificial intelligence can help.

As companies aim to take advantage of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, employees need to acquire new skills.

In a 2022 survey, executives estimated that 38% of their workers would need "fundamental retraining or replacement" within three years to address workforce skills gaps, according to research from the MIT Center for Information Systems Research.

People with AI and data skills are in high demand, and attracting and retaining talent is hard and time-consuming, according to Nick van der Meulen, a research scientist at MIT CISR. "Training is a really important way for us to achieve results. For performance, for retention, for customer experience, and for innovation, it's the way to go," van der Meulen said.

And in many cases, workers want to be trained. In a 2022 Society for Human Resource Management survey, 55% of employees said they need more training to do their job better, and 76% said they would be more likely to stay with a company that offered continuous learning.

To retrain employees, companies need precise insight into workforce skills, including ones that are missing but would contribute to future success, van der Meulen said. To gain such insight, companies such as Johnson & Johnson are using "skills inference" — the process of using AI to analyze employee data to quantify skills proficiency and identify areas for improvement.

Here's a look at how companies can perform skills inference, and how it can guide workforce planning and employees' career development.

3 steps for skills inference

Johnson & Johnson began an effort to improve digital expertise among employees in early 2020, starting with the company's 4,000 technologists before expanding to other business units the following year. The skills inference process comprised three steps:

Skills taxonomy. This step involves defining the skills required "to reimagine business processes and develop future digital offerings," van der Meulen said. "It's not about the skills we need to be successful today, but to succeed five to 10 years from now." Johnson & Johnson identified 41 specific "future-ready" skills, such as master data management and robotic process automation, that were grouped into 11 capabilities.

Skills evidence. Here, an organization selects the right sources of employee data for skills inference. For Johnson & Johnson, these sources were the HR information system, the recruiting database, its learning management system, and one project management platform. Leadership made it clear that skills insights did not factor into employees' performance reviews and that the information was de-identified and used at an aggregate level to support strategic workforce planning. Employees were free to opt out.

Skills assessment. In the final step, Johnson & Johnson used a large language model to measure each technologist's proficiency in each of the 41 future-ready skills, using a 0-5 scale. The company also asked workers to rate themselves on the same skills using the same scale; if the two scores deviated by less than one point,

the company considered the scores usable. Communicating that the process would be used only for skill development as opposed to performance evaluation helped the company gain worker buy-in and mitigated bias in self-reporting skills, van der Meulen said.

The skills inference process proved to be powerful at both the personal and enterprise levels. Individual technologists could compare their existing skills with the skills required for a future role they envisioned for themselves and use that information as a catalyst to drive their training. Use of the company's professional development ecosystem increased 20% after the first round of skills inference; as of March 2024, 90% of technologists had accessed the learning platform.

Meanwhile, executives gained access to heat-map data about technology skills proficiency by geographic region and business line. "This is beneficial for strategic workforce planning," van der Meulen said. "You can see areas where you're strong and areas where you're a little weaker. You may say, 'Maybe we need to develop our decision science capability in Europe. This is where we should put development dollars.'"

A "career lattice" instead of a career ladder

There are obvious benefits to helping employees identify the skills they need to continue contributing to a company as it undergoes a digital transformation. But van der Meulen offered a word of caution to leaders who want to do this: Not everyone will want to move through the organization the same way.

> *"Skills are dynamic. What makes you successful today won't make you successful three years, five years, or 10 years from now."*
>
> **NICK VAN DER MEULEN**
> RESEARCH SCIENTIST, MIT CISR

Many employees seek traditional promotions with higher pay and additional responsibilities, but leaders should "look beyond those career ladders and look for a latticework" of interconnected roles, he said.

Some will want to make a lateral move to a similar role in another business unit. (This is common at companies the size of Johnson & Johnson, which had about 130,000 employees at the time.) Others will want to take on an emerging title that requires specific new skills — such as AI prompt engineer, a role that was largely nonexistent two years ago. Others may be ready to take a step back, possibly for personal reasons.

For all of these workers, training needs to go above and beyond online learning modules. Workers will need mentorship, hands-on training, and other programs "where people can really put what they want to learn into action right away," van der Meulen said. Leaders need to be ready to give workers the ability to determine what skills they will learn, when they will learn them, and how they would like to work once they've acquired those skills.

Leaders will also need to confront the class of workers who resist change and insist on continuing to complete the same tasks they've always done. Van der Meulen recommended showing these individuals what upskilling can mean for them, even if they're currently effective in their roles and performing well. Specific examples of people who have made exciting career moves can go a long way here.

"People need to understand that skills are dynamic," van der Meulen said. "What makes you successful today won't make you successful three years, five years, or 10 years from now."

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