

FUTURE WORK IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: IMPACTS AND SURVIVAL TACTICS

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ABSTRACT

Since the rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in 2022, knowledge workers have anxieties about being replaced by AI. Many tasks can now be completed by AI. There is a need to rethink which tasks should remain human-led and which need redesigned processes. This paper reviews results of several recent surveys on the impacts of AI on the future work. Based on these results, the paper discusses various skills required in the age of AI, namely 1) AI literacy like prompt engineering, 2) analytical and creative thinking skills for adapting to AI, and 3) soft skills such as communication skill for integration and interaction with other workers. Finally, the paper discusses the importance of generalizing specialists highlighting the combination of specialized depth and general breadth. These capabilities are helpful to avoid being replaced by AI. With deep domain expertise, they understand, analyse and construct methods to solve problems in a certain field. With cross-disciplinary connection, they can cross sectors, connect AI, and work with others in various fields. They are the best people who know how to use knowledge to create practical results.

KEYWORDS: *Generative AI, Knowledge Worker, AI Replacement Anxiety, AI Impact Survey, Workforce Adaptation.*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the rapid entry of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into the enterprise site in 2022, whether people will be replaced by AI has become a common anxiety for almost all knowledge workers. The core tasks of knowledge workers can now be completed in a few seconds as long as a worker enters instructions. AI can take over many output tasks; the question is no longer if people will be replaced. Enterprises and workers must think what work needs to be done by people alone and which working methods have come to the time to be redesigned.

The Future of Jobs Report 2025 (World Economic Forum, 2025) surveyed corporate employers from 55 economies around the world, and in 2025, 47% of tasks are mainly completed by humans alone, 22% are completed by science and technology (machines and algorithms), and 30% are completed by human-computer collaboration. But by 2030, the tasks completed by human beings alone will be 33% and the proportion of completed by science and technology alone will increase to 34%. It is worth noting that what is replaced is not the whole position, but the form of humanity completing the task alone. The report estimates that 81.5% of the tasks completed by humans alone will be replaced by automation; but the proportion of human-computer collaboration remains at about one-third. The report emphasizes that human-computer collaboration is becoming a key watershed between human independence and full automation. In other

words, AI does not directly replace people but eliminates those working models that have not been redesigned.

This has made a key turning point. The competition in the AI era is not only about who owns AI tools and whether people can use them, but also who knows better how to redesign the workflow, clearly divide AI and human beings, and cultivate empowered AI-augmented human resources. McKinsey & Company (2023) pointed out that AI can automate the work that accounts for 60-70% of employees' time. Generative AI is applied to the activities of various knowledge workers and gives full play to its potential, which can bring 6.1 trillion to 7.9 trillion dollars of economic benefits to the global economy every year. However, from the skill level, the replaceability of generative AI is far less comprehensive than imagined. After analysing more than 2,800 subdivision skills, none of them is rated as "extremely high substitutability", of which 69% are low or extremely low substitutability.

At present, generative AI still has obvious limitations in the work that requires physical execution, careful judgment and a high degree of situational understanding, especially the ability to rely on human interaction, such as listening, empathy, perception and value judgment (He *et al.*, 2024). This is also why, in most enterprises, the best role of AI is not to act as a full agent, but to be an assistant to be commanded, corrected and supervised. The first step for enterprises to introduce generative AI is not to choose tools, but to clarify the goal first: Why use AI? Which process do we want to improve? Then, it evaluates the credibility of data and technology (He *et al.*, 2023). After establishing the basic capability, it will be piloted from a small scale and gradually expanded. The ideal human-computer collaboration model is that humans play the role of navigators and gatekeepers, AI is responsible for high-volume and repetitive tasks; humans are responsible for decision-making, ethics and situational judgment (Zhang, Lin & Liu, 2026).

This paper will first discuss impacts of AI on workers, based on results of various surveys. Then, it suggests the new skills required to survive in the era of AI and discusses the concept of generalizing specialist, who can avoid being replaced by AI in the job market.

INSIGHTS OF VARIOUS SURVEYS ON IMPACTS OF AI IN THE JOB MARKET

Based on the State of AI: Global Survey 2025 (McKinsey & Company, 2025), 88% of organizations use AI in, at least, one business function, 66% of them have not scaled AI enterprise-wide while most remain in experimentation/piloting phases. Larger companies (49%) are more likely to scale than smaller ones (29%). In addition, 62% of the organizations are experimenting with AI agents while 23% are scaling agents primarily in IT and knowledge management. Revenue gains are reported in marketing/sales, strategy/finance, and product development while cost benefits are reported in software engineering, manufacturing, and IT. There are 64% of the organizations with improved innovation and 50% note better satisfaction. AI high performers (top 6%) are three times more likely to pursue transformative business changes with AI. They focus on growth/innovation and redesign workflow, and they invest more than 20% of digital budgets in AI.

According to the survey, 32% of the organizations expect workforce reduction, 43% predict no change, and 13% foresee growth. Hiring for AI roles (e.g., software/data engineers) will be increased. However, 51% of the organizations faced negative consequence (e.g., AI inaccuracy). High performers reported more risks (e.g., IP infringement and compliance) but mitigate more proactively. AI adoption is ubiquitous. High performers differentiate through bold ambitions, workflow redesign, leadership commitment, and higher investment. The transition from pilots to scaled impact remains a key challenge.

Based on the AI Adoption Accelerates Survey (Morgan Stanley, 2026), AI adoption is rapidly accelerating. There are 56% of surveyed companies already using AI or machine learning. Larger companies are with adoption rates significantly higher than the smaller ones. The top motivation factors for AI adoption include enhancing productivity and efficiency (the primary goal for most), improving data analysis and insights and reducing costs. AI adoption can leverage data and automation. For example, technology and financial companies use AI for data analytics, fraud detection, and customer service automation. Healthcare companies focus on diagnostics, patient monitoring, and drug discovery. Industrials use AI for predictive maintenance and supply chain optimization. Companies focus their AI investments on cloud infrastructure to provide necessary computation power, software and applications, and cybersecurity. The survey concludes that AI adoption is moving from the experimental phase into broad-based implementation. This can boost productivity and gain insights from data. However, there are significant barriers including data security, privacy, unclear return on investment (ROI) and a shortage of skilled talent.

Based on AI Jobs Barometer report (PWC, 2025), AI is driving significant shifts in the labour market where demand is growing for AI specialists and roles complemented by AI. Analysis of over half a billion job ads shows that jobs with high AI exposure are growing 3.5 times faster with commanding wage premiums (up to 25%) compared to roles with low AI exposure. AI is creating demand and reshaping work, not only causing displacement. The effects vary dramatically by industry. For example, financial services, information technology, and professional services see the fastest growth in AI-related job ads and skill demands. These are knowledge-intensive sectors with AI analytical and creative tasks. Manufacturing and transportation services are exposed to AI automation. They suggest a different adoption path focused on robotics and operational efficiency.

The report distinguishes between AI exposure (i.e. the potential for a job's tasks to be automated by AI) and AI complementarity (i.e., how much a job can be enhanced and made more productive by AI tools). Jobs with high complementarity (e.g., financial analysts, lawyers) are with the strongest growth and wage increases. AI augments human skills instead of replacing them entirely. There is also soaring demand for AI-specific skills (like machine learning) and soft skills that AI cannot replicate, such as leadership, critical thinking, and creativity. The most desirable roles blend both technical and human-centric skills. PWC's data suggest that the AI revolution creates jobs and increases productivity in roles that work alongside AI. Businesses and workers should invest in new skills and rethink work processes to harness AI as a complementary tool. The labour market shows a growing divide between workers who can leverage AI and those who are more vulnerable to automation.

Based on the Harvard Business Review (Davenport & Srinivasan, 2026), companies are conducting layoffs based on AI's anticipated future capabilities, not because AI currently outperforms human workers. Despite low U.S. unemployment, generative AI adoption is linked to recent layoffs and hiring slowdowns. The most affected sectors are tech industry, customer service, programming jobs, and entry-level roles. CEOs (Ford, Amazon, Sales force, JP Morgan Chase) predict widespread elimination of white-collar positions. Layoffs are driven by expectations that AI will soon handle tasks currently performed by humans. Firms prioritize strategic bets on future efficiency over current AI limitations. This is a historical contrast. Past automation (e.g., robotics) required proven effectiveness before workforce reductions. AI-driven layoffs are pre-emptively fuelled by projections rather than demonstrated results.

Based on the CNBC survey of senior human resource (HR) leaders from the CNBC Workforce Executive Council (Epperson & Dhue, 2026), 45% of them predict AI will impact nearly half or more of all jobs, 44% expect impact on less

than half of jobs and 11% foresee no impact. There are 67% of the HR leaders reporting AI already affects jobs today (automating tasks/changing daily work), 50% say it impacts fewer than half of current roles, and 22% see no current impact. In 2026, there are workforce change and headcount plans. There are 38% of HR leaders who will maintain current staffing levels, 29% plan to increase headcount and 29% plan to decrease headcount. Workforce reductions are driven solely by general need to cut costs (not AI efficiency gains). Regarding AI's positive effects, 61% say AI improved company efficiency and 78% report AI made their workforce more innovative. There is a hiring shift moving toward skill-based, AI-enabled hiring over traditional degree-based recruitment. There are 26% of recent job postings poised for radical transformation by AI. AI reshapes the future of work. It actually accelerates the human experience, instead of replacing it.

AI in the Workforce Survey by Piktochart (Hwang, 2025) presents the results of a survey exploring the adoption, perceptions, and impact of AI tools (like ChatGPT, Gemini, Midjourney, etc.) in the modern workplace. A significant majority of professionals are using AI tools to assist with their work. Primary uses include brainstorming, drafting content, summarizing information, and creating visuals. The top benefit is a major boost in productivity and efficiency. Most respondents view AI as a collaborative tool or assistant that enhances human work rather than an outright threat to their jobs. The focus is on using AI to handle mundane tasks, freeing up time for strategic and creative thinking. However, there are concerns about factual inaccuracies. The generic output requires human proof and editing. Many employees also worried about data privacy (e.g., sensitive company or client data). Insufficient formal training on how to use AI effectively and ethically is a common problem. Official company policy is required to change. While individuals are rapidly adopting AI, many organizations do not have clear guidelines, training, or strategic direction on AI usage. This may lead to ad-hoc and risky implementation. There is an urgent need for companies to establish clear guidelines, provide training, and integrate AI thoughtfully into workflows.

Today AI has become global learning from blue-collar workers to white-collar professionals. The top priority of workers is the ability of scientific and technological collaboration. The key is how to face the new changes. School education alone can no longer cope with the rapid changes in today's world. The days of relying on a single skill to keep the livelihood are gone forever. In the face of change, people should have the ability to constantly learn new skills (re-skilling). If enterprises and talents want to survive and thrive under change, continuous learning and transformation is the only way. AI will not replace all manpower and only some of it will become obsolete. The relation between functions and talents will be changed in the future. There is the increased demand of new kinds of work, and some work will become automated completely.

VARIOUS SKILLS REQUIRED IN THE AI ERA

From an organizational perspective, enterprises are moving towards AI workflow: adding AI assistance to the workflow to create end-to-end AI solutions (Bai *et al.*, 2025). Organizations should aim to automate business processes from end-to-end as much as possible. Organizations should first analyse the existing systems and processes to find out what can be improved. Then there is task disassembly and process design, which disassembles the work into finer sub-tasks, such as handling customer complaints, which is disassembled into identifying emotions and generating responses. When these steps are clearly defined, there is an opportunity to pass API (application programming interface), the mechanism of communication between the two pieces of software connects the AI tools, internal databases and external services used in each step, so that the data is no longer handled by human hands but flows automatically between systems.

However, while pursuing efficiency, there is a key premise that cannot be ignored. People must stay in the process. AI can be fast, but not necessarily correct; only by designing checkpoints and cultivating employees' judgment ability can AI play a long-term value (Bosek-Rak, & Kaszyński, 2026). In the end, the AI workflow is not only about technological upgrading, but also about the transformation of management thinking. Enterprises are moving from people performing tasks assisted by tools to process automation and people responsible for decision-making (Wang & Long, 2025). In such a transformation, what will not be replaced is not a certain skill, but a person who can design collaboration, make judgments, and be responsible for the results (Li, Ouyang & Lin, 2025).

Machine deep learning is not enough to only quantitatively analyse but should incorporate humanistic emotions and social elements. Humans cannot calculate huge amounts of data, but they are good at abstract thinking and creativity. The two should complement each other. Human beings should become changeable in the future, because change will continue to happen. In the future world, we should not be afraid of the machine army, but we are afraid of not being willing or able to continue to learn and change. What are the most needed core skills with the highest return on investment at present and in the future?

AI Literacy

This is the fastest growing skill. It does not require a user to learn coding, but the user must understand the functions, limitations and operation of AI. This will determine whether the user is empowered by AI or replaced by it. People should learn AI basic knowledge and prompt engineering because this is the skill with the highest return on investment at present.

To be able to cooperate well with AI, one of the key points is to learn prompt engineering. Employers should provide employees with training on advanced prompt writing skills and AI literacy. Prompt engineering is the process of guiding AI to produce results that are more in line with the demand by constantly adjusting the instructions. To do a good job in prompt engineering, there are several techniques, such as the chain of thought, to guide the large-scale language model to reason step by step without giving the answer directly. Many large language models (LLMs) cannot complete complex tasks at once. The structure has limitations, including lack of planning ability and limited working memory. When performing tasks that require multi-step calculations, arithmetic errors or skipping steps often occur. For example, if GPT-4 directly calculates the number of prime numbers between 100 and 200, it will give an incorrect answer, but if it is asked to list the prime numbers first and then calculate the number, its answer is correct. This practice is usually for users to add instructions at the end of the prompt, such as "Describe your reasoning steps" and "Let's think step by step, please write down all the intermediate steps". This allows users to judge the process of reasoning and avoid AI skipping important steps.

Then there is the role setting. Users can simulate what kind of knowledge status, style and reasoning mode through the instruction control model, so as to produce more expected answers. For example, if a user asks "why is the ocean blue" and sets AI as a physicist, the answer will be "the ocean is blue because only blue light is not absorbed by water molecules". If it is other characters, the answer will be different.

The reverse engineering that provides examples also helps to produce more accurate answers. For example, GPT-4 may play text adventure games (players must read the text description, understand the current state, and use correct text instructions to advance the task). In the first game, GPT-4 could not complete the task, but when the model example was given, it could be completed smoothly.

With AI agents, the centralization of technology, and geopolitical changes, enterprises recognize that data security has become a new problem. Cybersecurity management is a fastest growing position with high demand but shortage of talents. An employee needs to build hands-on experience and portfolio in network security to prove that he has repaired vulnerabilities or established a defence system.

Analytical and Creative Thinking

This is the most demand of all skills, and it is a bridge to convert data into decision-making. AI can provide a large amount of data, but an employee needs analytical thinking to judge the meaning behind these data and make high-quality judgments in complex information flows. Positions that do not require analytical thinking will be the first to disappear. An employee needs to break down problems, identify biases, and verify the source of information. These are the weapons against false information.

AI can imitate perfectly, but its limitation is that it can only recombine what has happened in the past. Human creativity comes from the ability to put forward new concepts and challenge the status quo. The demand for people who are willing to innovate through design thinking and structured methods has increased. This is an important factor that distinguishes growth positions from declining positions (Jia *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, workers must cultivate growth mindset, regard failure as a valuable data experiment, and quickly turn to pivot in the event of collapse (Schulz *et al.*, 2026).

Soft Skills

The higher the degree of automation, the more important communication skills because the professional division of labour is becoming increasingly complicated, and the need for integration and interaction is higher (Perez, Conway & Roques, 2022). Machines can exchange information and parameters, but it cannot replace emotions and feelings. The ability to understand what people think is becoming increasingly important. For example, that online banks have machine customer service, but customers often want to talk to real people, because only people can understand the emotional motivation of another person. Even if the computer is smart enough to defeat the world chess king, only human beings have care and empathy. In the era of artificial intelligence, people should not continue to regard human beings as variables in the formula of productivity but also establish a new culture that attaches more importance to love, service and empathy than ever before (Einola & Khoreva, 2023).

The demand growth rate of leadership and social influence even exceeds that of AI literacy. When enterprises carry out large-scale changes, leaders need to communicate clearly, build trust, and efficiently manage hybrid teams including human and AI systems without formal authority (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2020). The biggest obstacle to enterprise transformation is the skill gap (Mirbabaie *et al.*, 2022). Talent management determines our success or failure as a leader, because it is about how to explore our potential, cultivate our ability, and create an environment where people are willing to stay. It is about looking at talents strategically (Sen, Xiaomei & Lin, 2022). Resilience, flexibility & reliability are indispensable skills. Reliability is the most stable and continuous skill. In high-risk areas, the company is willing to pay high salaries to those who do things right every time. AI will produce errors, and only human concentration can capture and fix these errors. Resilience & flexibility is the ability to maintain stability under pressure and adapt to change (Hunt, Sarkar & Warhurst, 2022).

IMPORTANCE OF GENERALIZING SPECIALIST

To win in the AI era, it is never to compare speed, memory and accuracy with AI (Hu, Mohi Ud Din & Tahir, 2025). The real way is to become a person that AI cannot replace. In the past, enterprises liked to hire students who were obedient, smart, stable, had high scores, low error rates, and always handed in standard answers. But in recent years, whether it is Google, Tesla, DeepMind or OpenAI, their recruitment system has changed. They pay less attention to students' GPA results but pay more attention to a generalizing specialist highlighting the combination of specialized depth and general breadth.

Specialized depth represents deep expertise in a certain field. The point is not how many categories we know, but whether we understand deeply enough and whether we understand the principle behind it, see the logic of operation, and can master the whole structure with systematic thinking. This depth requires us to go from knowledge to analysis, from analysis to judgment, and guide us to propose methods and actions. For example, those who do data science should understand why the model is constructed in this way, learn the design logic behind it, how data flows, and behavioural variables.

General breath represents the ability to cross-link. This does not require us to be fluent in everything, but to have several abilities that AI has not fully achieved, including learning to use AI and data tools, communicating effectively, cooperating with people from different backgrounds, understanding ethics and risks, and being able to establish links between different fields. For example, if we study biology, can we use AI for genetic analysis? If a student study law, can he understand the deviation of AI and algorithms? These abilities are what can highlight our value in the future.

The preciousness of such talents is that they can not only study to the end but also contact all parties. Unlike AI, they will only reorganize the existing answers. Because they can ask questions, build solutions outside the framework, and can work in cross-fields. That is why what is scarce is not top students, but those who know how to integrate real life, analyse and master interdisciplinary knowledge.

Today's generalizing specialist is a completely different concept. The reason why such talents are scarce is that they have the ability that AI cannot replicate at present. With deep domain expertise, they delve into a certain field, which is enough to understand, analyse and construct methods to solve problems that have never occurred. With cross-disciplinary connection, they can cross-sectors, connect AI, data, psychology, linguistics, business and ethics, truly practice, and become operational products or solutions that can influence the world. In other words, they are not necessarily top students with the highest scores in the exam. They are the best people who know how to use knowledge to create practical results (deliverables).

In the era of AI, experts and generalists are not enough. The problem of pure experts is that the professional scope is too narrow (Teng *et al.*, 2024). They may only be familiar with a certain set of techniques, a certain analytical method or some fixed program skills. However, AI learns faster, covers a wider range, and can absorb many cases in a short time. If a knowledge can be standardized, processed, and become a learnable data content, AI will eventually do it faster, more accurately and at a lower cost than people. Human expertise is not useless, but the market's demand for some old-fashioned experts may become increasingly difficult to maintain (Hossain *et al.*, 2025). The challenge of generalists is that they have a wide range of knowledge but not deep enough. It is difficult for enterprises to put them in a clear position, their irreplaceability is still low, and their roles are often blurred.

The reason why generalizing specialists become the core is that they make up for the structural gap of these two kinds of people very well. They have enough in-depth expertise in a category to understand the essence, analyse the structure and put forward solutions; at the same time, they have horizontal ability to understand, communicate, integrate and create value across fields. Their specialty is not isolated knowledge, but knowledge that can be extended to establish direct dialogue with other fields. AI is an amplifier for them, and the ability is the lever to diffuse professional knowledge. The ability to combine and link is the most valuable way of thinking and working in the new era (Tenakwah & Watson, 2025). The most direct way to understand such talents is to observe the people who have been ahead in reality. Through the original academic foundation, coupled with technology, data thinking and AI tools, they have slowly developed a deeper and more adaptable professional identity. The following are examples that come from the transformation of the global workplace in recent years.

If language students can combine language ability, language sensitivity and critical thinking with data analysis, content strategy, and AI writing tools, they will change from traditional writers to content strategists and even AI prompt architect. They can understand both the depth of language and algorithms and know how to guide the language model to write stories, so that they can help AI produce structural content that is closer to human thinking.

A new path is to integrate chemistry with programming, AI and machine learning to become a new field of chemical informatics. The core of these fields is to digitize chemistry to solve complex problems (e.g., discovery of new drugs). Professional depth is still important, but the presentation method and working method are completely different.

With the popularization of AI, AI ethics and AI policy/governance have gradually become professional fields. These emerging majors need to understand the deviation of algorithms, data privacy, human rights protection, and the design of scientific and technological policies and systems at the same time. Business students themselves have logic and argumentation training. If they add their understanding of the AI system and risk management, they can occupy a key position, help define the boundaries of AI, and participate in the formulation of future rules.

Data science students choose to combine psychological theory with computer programming language and AI behaviour analysis, resulting in the emergence of user experience researcher and behavioural data scientist and other new roles. Their job is not only to understand people, but to transform people into quantifiable behaviour patterns that can be explained by models, and analyse emotions, motivations and decision-making. This is completely different from the single path in the laboratory or clinic in the past.

The common point of these roads is not to change careers, but to amplify, reserve and extend the original professional depth in a new way.

CONCLUSION

It is predicted that in the future, most of the current professional skills will be obsolete because of the application of AI. In this era of rapid change, what are the core competencies of talents for survival? It is necessary to stop working blindly and invest in us accurately to gain a firm position in the fiercely competitive future. There are great changes in skills and new opportunities. The global workplace is at a turning point. The report of the McKinsey Global Institute (McKinsey & Company, 2025) warns us that by 2030, 39% of the world's existing job skills will be obsolete. This is not a slow trend, but a large-scale skill revolution. More specifically, to cope with the future job market, existing workers need to relearn skills. This means that if they fail to improve their skills, they will face the risk of being eliminated (Boustani, 2022).

However, this change is by no means bleak. This is a great opportunity for those who can foresee trends and equip themselves in advance. Many new jobs will be created in the future. Many discussions still focus on how job opportunities disappear, which is a completely negative argument and repeats itself. In fact, the way to survive lies in the possibility to seize new opportunities (Zhang & Yu, 2025). Otherwise, it would be too late to start exploring after being eliminated. In this information era of knowledge explosion, the real advantage comes from the mental intelligence that cannot be replaced by AI.

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