



TRANSITION

TO WIN

BEYOND AUTOMATION: HOW TO LEAD

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE AI ECONOMY

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The ascent of large language models (LLMs) caught governments, businesses, and individuals unprepared. In just two months after launch, GPT reached 100 million users, reshaping the digital landscape by February 2023. The speed of adoption marked a fundamental turning point: Artificial intelligence was no longer a distant promise; it had become an immediate and transformative force.

The opportunity is vast. Google estimates that AI could unlock £400bn in value for the UK economy alone, while McKinsey projects over £3 trillion globally¹. Yet realising these gains will depend less on technological prowess and more on human adaptability. Work, skills, and talent are on the cusp of profound transformation. Equity in this new economy will not be automatic; it will be shaped by deliberate action today.

Every leader must become a learner. Every organisation must move beyond technology procurement to building AI-Ready Teams, teams capable of blending human judgment with AI capabilities, continuously learning, adapting, and thriving in an environment of rapid technological change.

This paper sets out our latest thinking on how Generative AI is reshaping work, skills, and equity, and why investing in the development of AI-Ready Teams is the critical priority of this era.

¹<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/the-economic-potential-of-generative-ai-the-next-productivity-frontier>

1 / SCANNING THE HORIZON

“It came in two ways, gradually and then suddenly.”

This phrase, originally used by Ernest Hemingway to describe bankruptcy, was recently cited by Joseph Fuller, Professor at Harvard Business School², to capture how AI will transform industries. It is the most fitting description of what lies ahead.

Today, we find ourselves in the gradual phase. Experiments are taking place across industries. Leaders are evaluating risks, piloting projects, and cautiously adapting workflows. Yet history tells us that this period will not last indefinitely. At some point, the pace will shift. A small number of organisations will have run enough experiments, gathered enough evidence, and developed enough confidence to scale AI deployment across their business models. When they do, they will reset the benchmarks for success. The starting gun will sound, and others will scramble to keep up.

We anticipate two distinct eras in the AI transition.

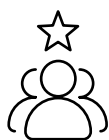
The first will be one of replacement, where AI is introduced to existing tasks and processes to drive efficiency, without fundamentally altering the structures of work or society.

The second era will be one of reimagination, where the very nature of work, organisations, and value creation is redesigned from the ground up.

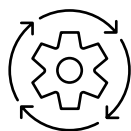
A useful historical parallel can be found in the adoption of electricity. When first introduced in the 1870s, electricity displaced coal power in transport and manufacturing, yielding early productivity gains. But the true transformation only came decades later when businesses reimagined what a factory could be in the electric era. No longer constrained by the need to co-locate power generation and manufacturing, factories reorganised around new layouts, production lines, and flows of materials, fundamentally reshaping productivity and growth³.

AI will follow a similar path. The immediate focus is on swapping AI into current workflows, automating tasks, speeding up customer service, and generating content. But the greater economic and societal impact will only emerge when we reimagine industries themselves through the lens of AI-native design.

McKinsey estimates that half of today’s work activities could be automated sometime between 2030 and 2060, depending on adoption rates. This signals not just a shift in specific roles or sectors, but a foundational shift in the architecture of the economy.



ALL LEADERS MUST NOW EMBRACE THE ROLE OF LEARNER.



THERE IS NO TEXTBOOK FOR THE AI TRANSITION. NO STATIC ROADMAP TO FOLLOW.



THE FUTURE IS BEING WRITTEN LIVE BY THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO EXPERIMENT, ADAPT, AND REIMAGINE.

²<https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/is-ai-coming-for-your-job>

³ Power and Prediction, Agrawal, Gans and GoldFarb, 2022. The electricity example is from this book. The book uses the notion of a ‘point’ solution followed by a ‘system’ solution’.

2 / TECH TALENT WILL ENDURE

Much has been made of the risk that AI poses to the profession of software engineering. If AI can write and correct code, what role remains for the software engineer?

Today, the productivity gains are real. McKinsey estimates a 50% uplift in engineering productivity through AI-assisted tools⁴. GitHub Copilot, for example, already enables developers to write code faster, spot errors earlier, and experiment more freely. And Google has estimated that automation of admin tasks could save **122 hours per employee per year**⁵.

But history suggests a different outcome than replacement. When typewriters increased clerical productivity by a factor of ten, the clerical workforce did not shrink; it expanded, supporting a broader and more complex range of business operations. When adding machines increased bookkeeping productivity, demand for bookkeepers rose. The same happened when Excel amplified accountants' impact; more sophisticated accounting became accessible and necessary.

The same dynamic will play out for software engineers.

As the cost and time to develop software fall, the demand for software, particularly AI-enhanced software, will rise dramatically. Software will become more pervasive, more embedded into every function of the enterprise, from marketing to manufacturing to legal services.

Engineers will not disappear. But the skills required will evolve profoundly.

AI literacy will become table stakes, and building AI-first architecture systems that assume intelligent agents as active participants will matter more than writing manual code. Knowledge of prompt engineering, model integration, and AI system monitoring will become core competencies. New roles will also emerge: AI Safety Engineers to ensure reliability and ethical standards; Data Engineers to maintain the infrastructure AI requires; and Prompt Engineers to optimise AI outputs.

Adaptability, not tenure, will define excellence.

The pattern is clear: every industrial revolution expanded opportunity for those who mastered new tools. AI will be no different. The opportunities will grow, but they will belong to those who can move fast and learn continuously.

At Makers, we have re-engineered our training to match this reality. We build AI-Ready Teams by embedding AI-native skills into our programmes: using AI not only as a tool to deliver outcomes, but as a fundamental reimagining of how technology is designed, developed, and deployed.

⁴ <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/the-economic-potential-of-generative-ai-the-next-productivity-frontier>

⁵ Reuters, April 24, 2024: "Workers could save 122 hours a year by adopting AI for admin tasks, says Google"



3 / THE RISE OF AI-READY TEAMS

To succeed in the next era of work, organisations must focus not only on integrating AI into systems but on fundamentally upgrading the human side of the enterprise.

In the past, success often hinged on mastering particular technical skills or domain knowledge that remained relatively stable over time. The arrival of AI shifts the ground beneath those assumptions. **The individuals and teams who thrive in this new landscape will not simply be those with the most knowledge today. They will be those most able to adapt, learn, and reimagine how they work alongside AI tomorrow.**

Working effectively with AI demands an operating system change for humans. Unlike the rigid, rule-based technologies of the past, which required structured data input and narrow adherence to formal processes, AI technologies are capricious and fluid. They operate in natural language, handle ambiguity, and require a human partner who can shape, probe, and guide them effectively.

The implications are profound.

Jobs that sound familiar will require radically new skills. McKinsey's research highlights Customer Operations, Marketing and Sales, Software Engineering, and Product R&D as domains with the most immediate potential for AI impact⁶. In areas like customer service, AI can retrieve personal information faster, resolve issues more consistently, and upsell more effectively. Interestingly, these gains are framed less as a replacement of human workers and more as a mechanism to raise the performance of all employees towards the level of today's best performers.

But working alongside these new AI capabilities will not be automatic.

⁶ <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/the-economic-potential-of-generative-ai-the-next-productivity-frontier#business-value>

To build AI-ready teams, individuals must be willing to abandon skills and mental models that made them successful in the past. They must embrace continuous learning not episodically, but as a permanent feature of their working lives. They must develop the emotional resilience to navigate the loss, uncertainty, and challenge that come with constant disruption.

TWO QUALITIES WILL DEFINE THE SUCCESS OF AI-READY TEAMS:

- **Learning Quotient (LQ):** The ability to keep learning as new technologies, workflows, and paradigms emerge.
- **Resilience:** The emotional stamina to persist through discomfort, failure, and ambiguity. This transformation will not be evenly distributed.

Just as AI adoption will be faster in some industries than others, the human capacity to adapt will vary. Some individuals and organisations will instinctively understand the need for radical upskilling and pivot quickly. Others will cling to old ways of working, hoping the storm will pass. It will not.

At a national level, the scale of this transition cannot be underestimated. **We believe that every member of the UK workforce, over 30 million people, will require either upskilling in their current role or reskilling for an entirely new career path.** This is a societal challenge of extraordinary proportions, on par with the industrial revolutions of the past.

Yet there is little evidence that governments fully grasp the urgency.

The risk is that without proactive support, including training subsidies/levys, career transition programmes, and AI literacy initiatives, existing inequalities will widen. Those with the resources, time, and institutional backing to adapt will surge ahead. Those without may be left behind.

Building AI-Ready Teams is not merely a business priority. It is a societal imperative.

4 / HOW TO PREPARE

A recent global survey of executives by McKinsey found that 40% of organisations are already planning to increase their investment in AI⁷. The so-called “AI high performers”, companies achieving at least a 20% EBIT boost from AI adoption, display clear patterns: they focus not only on tool deployment, but on widespread capability building across multiple functions. They are three times more likely than their peers to anticipate reskilling more than 30% of their workforce.

The lesson is simple: launching technology is phase zero.

Building AI-Ready Teams is the critical work.

THE FIRST CHARACTERISTIC OF AI-READY TEAMS IS THEIR ABILITY TO **FREE UP TIME.**

AI can radically simplify or automate tedious tasks that absorb human attention: drafting documents, summarising reports, coding boilerplate, and responding to routine customer queries. With effective AI integration, the time previously consumed by these activities can be liberated for higher-order work.

⁷ <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai-in-2023-generative-ais-breakout-year#leading>

THE SECOND CHARACTERISTIC IS THE ABILITY TO UNLEASH CAPABILITY.

AI is not just a time-saver. It is an amplifier. Tasks that once required expert knowledge statistical analysis, video editing, and market research, are increasingly accessible to non-experts through AI-enhanced tools. Natural language interfaces further lower barriers, enabling people to achieve outcomes that would have been out of reach in the past.

Together, these two dynamics, freeing time and unleashing capability, set the foundation for a more productive, innovative, and resilient workforce.

But achieving these outcomes requires more than giving people access to new tools.

It demands that organisations deliberately foster a culture of continuous learning.

Building an AI-Ready Team means investing in Learning Quotient (LQ): the ability to learn, adapt, and thrive in an environment of constant technological evolution.

It means normalising experimentation and tolerating smart failure.

It means building emotional resilience to support people through the discomfort of changing their daily routines, workflows, and identities at work.

Through these interventions, organisations can move beyond incremental gains and build the muscle required to succeed in the AI economy: adaptable, resilient, AI-ready teams, capable of learning faster than the rate of change.

5 / IMPACT ON EQUITY

The extraordinary shifts unfolding in the workforce will create new winners and losers. But the fault lines have not yet been drawn. The choices made now, by governments, businesses, and individuals, will determine whether AI becomes a force for opportunity or a driver of deeper inequality.

It is often assumed that technological revolutions lift all boats. But history suggests otherwise. Without deliberate intervention, transformative technologies often exacerbate existing divides.

AI presents a unique challenge.

Unlike past automation waves, which primarily displaced manual or blue-collar work, the AI transition is likely to have a disproportionate impact on white-collar and knowledge work.

Middle managers, customer service agents, paralegals, and analysts, roles once seen as protected, may find large parts of their workflows automated or radically reshaped. Conversely, skilled trades, healthcare workers, and hands-on service roles may experience slower or less severe disruption in the near term. Educational background, traditionally a protective factor in labour market transitions, may not guarantee insulation from change. Extensive education and experience could become liabilities if they entrench ways of working that are resistant to new technologies.

The critical differentiator will not be what individuals know today, but how fast they can adapt to what they must know tomorrow.

Learning Quotient (LQ), the ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn, will emerge as a greater predictor of success than academic qualifications or even prior experience.

Yet access to reskilling opportunities is not equally distributed.

Those with financial security, flexible work arrangements, strong professional networks, and supportive employers will find it easier to pivot into new roles. Those without such advantages risk being left behind, caught in a cycle of displacement without meaningful pathways to new prosperity.

The experience of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS) provides a cautionary tale. While MOOCS promised to democratise education, in practice, they often reinforced existing inequalities: learners with prior educational advantages and personal support structures were far more likely to complete courses and translate them into economic gain.

There is hope that AI-enabled learning, particularly through personalised tutoring, adaptive learning platforms, and real-time feedback systems, could overcome some of these barriers.

But without targeted support and intentional system design, it is equally possible that AI-driven education will follow the same pattern: accelerating those already best positioned to succeed.

Finally, there is the broader risk of extreme wealth concentration.

Corporations with the resources to deploy and integrate AI at scale, and those who control foundational AI infrastructure, are positioned to capture disproportionate economic value. Without active redistribution mechanisms, whether through taxation, investment in public goods, or reskilling initiatives, the benefits of the AI transition could become narrowly concentrated, undermining societal cohesion.

Addressing these equity risks is not optional.

If left unattended, the consequences, political, social, and economic, will be profound.

Building AI-Ready Teams at scale, across sectors, geographies, and demographic groups, is essential to ensure that the AI revolution lifts all parts of society, not just a privileged few.

CONCLUSION

The shifts in work and skills that lie ahead will be breathtaking. Winning with AI will not be about acquiring the best models or platforms. It will be about building resilient, adaptive, and AI-ready teams, capable of freeing up time, unleashing new forms of creativity, and sustaining learning through continual disruption. The opportunity is historic. But it is not guaranteed. Only by investing intentionally in adaptability, resilience, and equity can we ensure that AI becomes a force for shared prosperity rather than division.

The time to build AI-Ready Teams is now.

READY TO WIN THE TRANSITION? START BY BACKING YOUR PEOPLE.

At Makers, we build the learners. They build your business. Teams equipped with the mindset, resilience, and Learning Quotient to transition confidently in a fast-moving world. From data upskilling to leadership development, we help organisations unlock potential where it already exists.

Because winning isn't about the tech. It's about your team.

Reskill. Upskill. Lead the transition.

Let's build the future — together.

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