AI catalysing a workforce revolution, now!

It will transform jobs - but how the workforce is transformed is up to you

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Running through the AI playground

Excitement and angst are building around the possibilities of what Artificial intelligence (AI) tools can unlock, but what exactly these tools are capable of and how they will work is still not widely understood by executives at large. After years of research and development, it appears that artificial intelligence (AI) is reaching a tipping point: capturing the imaginations of everyone from learners saving time on their essay writing to leaders leveraging the capabilities to transform massive technology companies. AI has seen exponential growth since 2015 with its various collections of subfields, such as deep-learning neural networks, machine learning, natural language processing modules, and robotics. The COVID-19 pandemic, which took the world by storm at the end of 2019, likely contributed to an increased interest and investment in AI and chatbot technologies, which may have indirectly accelerated the development of natural language processing models. The fourth quarter of 2022 saw the launch of an example of one such model, ChatGPT, accumulating one million users in five days; the fastest-adopted platform in the history of the internet. In comparison, Instagram took two and a half months to reach one million users and 30 months to reach ChatGPT's two-month benchmark of 100m users. GPT-4, launched in March 2023, has already shown disruptive potential across many industries and use cases. Now, with over 13m daily users, it is clear that ChatGPT has been integrated at an unprecedented rate into the way that millions of people across the workforce work.

According to Gartner's Emerging Technologies and Trends Impact Radar report, generative AI is one of the most disruptive and rapidly evolving technologies[1]. Generative AI refers to a type of artificial intelligence that has the ability to generate original and new content, including text, images, music, and other forms of media. Unlike other AI systems, which are typically designed to recognize patterns and make predictions based on existing data, generative AI operates by creating novel content from scratch. Generative AI has a diverse range of applications including generating new images, writing news articles, poetry, and even facilitating translation through hyper-document and data mining. Generative AI can produce new music tracks, sound effects, and even voice acting. As a large language model, ChatGPT is an example of generative AI that can be utilised in the workforce to streamline tasks and increase productivity, however this is truly dependent on how adoption and uptake is managed.

1. https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/5-impactful-technologies-from-the-gartner-emerging-technologies-and-trends-impact-radar-for-2022?ref=fireflies-ai-blog

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Why robots won't steal your job - they will transform it!

The potential threat of replacing humans with technology would exacerbate an already serious issue. However, there is hope: emerging technologies like AI can create a host of new job opportunities that didn't exist before, but it's important to stay current with the latest tools and features. Waiting for official online courses might be too slow, so it's crucial to stay ahead by continuously learning and adapting.

According to the expanded unemployment definition of South Africa, 53% of the population are unemployed. The World Population Review's 'Unemployment by country in 2023' report puts South Africa at the highest unemployment rate of the world[2]. This in itself presents a significant challenge, impacting the disposable income of families, increasing poverty, reducing economic output, and affecting the mental health of individuals.

The impact of automation through AI depends entirely on how effectively adoption is managed. While there are valid concerns about the impact of AI on the job market, there are exponential benefits that could positively impact the workforce and the economy.

The transformation of jobs enabled through the adoption of AI can be categorised into three main bands:

01

The jobs that AI might replace (medium to long term)
As AI automates repetitive, mundane and labour-intensive tasks such as scheduling, time management and planning, so will companies transition over time to employing less people into those specific roles, potentially leading to job redundancies. As AI improves, the typical jobs that it will replace might also include knowledge-based jobs — the extent of this still needs to be unpacked.

02

The jobs that AI might create (short to medium term)
The full impact of the jobs AI will create is still unknown. One can presume that these jobs will come in the form of 'AI power users'. For example, a 'prompt engineer' will need to understand how AI works in order to optimise requests through data analysis and insight generation. The workforce would therefore need to develop skills that enable their creative intuition and idea generation rather than mining digital artefacts — which is what machine learning and deep learning train these models to do.

03

**The jobs that AI could augment** (short to long term)
Inevitably AI will increase productivity and efficiency. Hyper-productivity and automation will drive accelerated workforce transformation. Employees will accelerate their own ability to collaborate, perform and boost their own productivity with the use of AI. Problem solving and analysis of tasks will free up time for employees, allowing for deeper thought processes to be used for value-adding activities.

2. https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/unemployment-by-country

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How can I use AI to do things faster and more completely? How do I free up my time to do more human things?

Executives have many resources and automated skills available to assist with providing initial data analysis and insights to inform strategies and execution plans. These roles each have various capabilities that, when combined and linked, can drive strategic insights which can be tailored to individual business needs. AI has enabled 'the art of the possible' by having the ability to be an 'executive personalised advisor' that provides content on an initial viewpoint in a matter of moments, allowing you the ability to scenario play, refine and test.
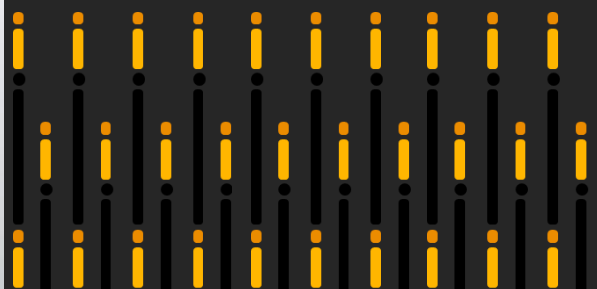
Enabling your key people power within the AI era
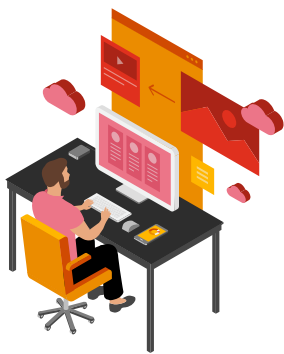
According to PwC's 26th Annual Global CEO Survey, 45% of CEOs in sub-Saharan Africa and 52% globally believe that skills shortages will impact profitability in their industry over the next ten years[3]. CEOs are upskilling employees to preserve and reinvent their business. Business reinvention will be a full-time sport for CEOs going forward and leveraging AI effectively will be a strategic enabler to this. The World Economic Forum predicts that 97 million new roles will be created by 2025 as humans, machines and algorithms increasingly work together[4].

To succeed in the digital age, companies must find, nurture, and incentivise adaptable, innovative, and skilled employees. This involves understanding the potential of automation, how organisations are utilising human skills, and the changing business landscape. It's crucial to manage the employee lifecycle effectively.

01   **Workforce scenario generation aligned to business strategy.**
Strategic workforce planning (SWP) enables organisations to realise their dream workforce by gaining insight in (historical and future) workforce flows and optimisation of HR interventions. SWP facilitates a data-driven foundation for short- and long-term strategic choices, in line with the best mix of skills, experience and education while taking into account employee costs. More regular iterations of SWP will need to be completed by organisations to ensure that, in this ever-changing skills landscape, they are constantly upskilling and planning to preserve and reinvent their future business.

02   **Predictive analytics and flight risks to determine workforce risk.**
Risks are more interconnected than ever, with profound advances in technology accelerating the need for organisations to not only understand the workforce-related risks impacting their organisations but to leverage them in driving competitive advantage. It is not enough for organisations to respond reactively: organisations and their leaders are now judged on how effectively they navigate these challenges. Whilst we can only influence the impact of the wider technological advances affecting our world, effective workforce risk management will allow organisations to take control of those risks that are within our reach, in turn leveraging them for competitive advantage. For example, OpenAI's toolset has the potential to optimise the management and analysis of workforce data. Now, by simply asking the right questions such as "what is the trend of people leaving the organisation in the technology areas of the business?" leadership can gain valuable insights into their workforce.

3. https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/c-suite-insights/ceo-survey-2023.html
4. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/robots-help-humans-future-jobs/

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03 **Enabling diversity and inclusion through skill development and deployment**.
The creation, sharing and application of knowledge are becoming central to everything organisations do in an AI-enabled world. But knowledge doesn't grow on its own. It's created and nurtured by people coming together to share their individual ideas. Now more than ever, organisations need to foster a community of inclusion with the human skills and behaviours that enable organisations to value differences, harness the power of diversity and be more effective in building trust.

Organisations can't protect jobs which are made redundant by technology — but they do have a responsibility to protect their people through nurturing agility, adaptability and re-skilling.

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What can you do to ensure your skills are relevant and that you are future-proofing your career?

1. Enable growth mindsets through AI-empowered personalised learning journeys

Amid disruptive change, lifelong learning and flexible skillsets will enable workers and organisations to be competitive. Encouraging lifelong learning recognises human potential and supports people to fulfil theirs. Alternative multi-dimensional career pathing, where workers are able to pivot and adapt to the needs of the organisation, will ensure the 'survival of the fittest' in this ever-changing and disruptive landscape. Each organisation will need to create a learning ecosystem by building connections between technology, in-demand skills and the individual needs of the workforce.

Like much of history, employees have evolved and shifted the dynamics and relationships between employee and employer. With the advancements of AI, the workforce now has access to personalised learning at a click of a button. Traditionally, the role of training sat with the employer with dedicated courses restricted to particular roles. AI provides a vehicle for self-learning and enables the application of the skills learnt in the working environment. This shift in hyper-personalisation, is stimulated through:

- AI serving as a **personalised tutor** that can assist at the pace and understanding of the learner in seconds.
- AI serving as a **personalised career coach**, providing employees with insights on potential career growth opportunities, necessary skills, and guidance for productive conversations with their employer regarding career path planning.

2. The importance of developing digital, soft and AI-related skills

As the future of work becomes ever more digitised, organisations will have new opportunities to make a commitment to their employees' success. These investments will pay off in the short run in a more energised business. And in the long run, they will also give employers a strong competitive advantage with their employees, customers and the community at large. Soft skills or more appropriately termed 'power skills' will be increasingly important for employment and career advancement in the age of AI disruption. Power skills will influence employees' professionalism, how well they work with others at the workplace, and how they interact with end users. They help employees communicate effectively and build professional relationships.

The future-proofing of an organisation's workforce includes a variety of fast-track developmental efforts. For example, enabling employees who are motivated to further accelerate their skills to do so by offering them a 'career pivot' to become what is termed a 'digital accelerator'. Accelerators rapidly deepen their skills in digital specialties such as data, automation, AI, and digital storytelling by learning a variety of self-service tools and coding languages and applying these skills across the business. Key to this is building a community among accelerators and empowering them to self-organise in ways that amplify their successes. Staying connected, working together, and sharing learnings that can elevate the entire organisation.

3. The role of OpenAI in transforming upskilling and training systems

The progressive nature of Open AI and other AI disruptors is causing an acceleration in how skills are developed, sustained and renewed. It is imperative for companies to reimagine how they bring learning to their workforce at scale and at speed to ensure effective upskilling and reskilling consistently takes place. The future success of an organisation will depend on how quickly they are able to understand, upskill and adopt AI through their workforce into the business. Organisations who do this effectively will have the upper hand in an ever-competing market.

AI governance, ethics, and regulation

The workplace will need to be further reimagined to create space, governance and principles for collaboration and drive new ways of working that will integrate people, place and AI.
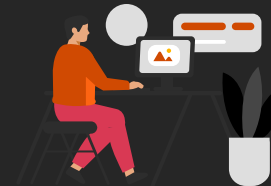

Integrate people
Reinvent their workforce strategy

+

Place
Align the workplace environment to the workforce strategy

+

AI
Optimise the AI solution necessary for people to work effectively, wherever they are located

For all of its positive potential, AI also brings with it numerous risks: amplifying prejudice, perpetuating falsehoods, and the threat of misuse, among others. According to UNESCO's 'Recommendation on the Ethics of AI' report[5]: "Effective policies are required to ensure that AI and technology remains in the service of humanity, leading to the achievement of collective goals, instead of putting humans at the service of these technologies. Better regulation entails setting out guidelines for how technologies need to be built and deployed, as well as building the capacities in governments worldwide, including for the procurement of AI technologies. Such policy action should be comprehensive and taken in alignment with human rights throughout the entire AI life cycle, with a focus on AI actors and technological processes".

Each company must approach this based on leading practice and their own culture and risk protocols:

a. Organisations need to ensure that AI is ethically sound and complies with regulations in all respects.
b. AI usage needs to be underpinned by a robust foundation of end-to-end governance.
c. AI needs to be supported by strong performance pillars addressing bias and fairness, interpretability and explainability, and robustness and security.

5. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/using-unesco-recommendation-ethics-ai-advance-ai-governance-around-world

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Human agents powering the use of AI

AI has the potential to be a collaborative tool which enhances human capabilities. It can enable the workforce across all job levels through its effective use. Successful organisational change goes much deeper than the technology: it requires the alignment of people-centric initiatives with a well-understood change story. It has the power to change behaviour and lead people along the envisaged transformational journey. It's about building an integrated programme of digital transformation initiatives, all working together to realise the business objectives. It calls for focus, perseverance and a relentless drive to realise outcomes. It's not about a definitive plan; it's agile and iterates on the go.

Next steps in using AI:
1. Be careful of what information you enter in any public AI platform. There is no absolute certainty that your prompts and replies are not being used to further refine the model, so it might 'learn' from your inputs and potentially present them as responses to other users asking questions within that domain of information. This is known to be the case for ChatGPT. Therefore it is advised not to enter any confidential/privileged information.

2. Embrace the existence of AI — Assess how AI will be appropriate for your organisation to allow access to making use of the tools and consider appropriate business rules. The individual user should not wholly rely on the information produced since there's no known method to confirm that all the responses out of a GPT model are factual. While ChatGPT's language processing capabilities are impressive, it has no internal mechanisms for the validation of information.

A movement in a new direction requires informed, strong and resilient leaders. However, in a fast-moving technology environment, it can be challenging for leaders to shift to a new way of working. It's often less about being an expert in the new technology, and more about being an agile leader who is open to trying new things.

• Are you ready to transform your organisation into a futuristic, agile hub which will enable you to leverage both technology and personalised, human-led connection?
• AI is already disrupting many business functions — are you embracing this opportunity to pivot your business towards new ways of work?

For more information on what digital tools to embrace, how to reinvent your business strategy and how to upskill your workforce and empower them through agile ways of working, please contact:

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