LUMO INSIGHTS

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AI’s workplace revolution: new Data, new Jobs, and new challenges for leaders

Executive Summary

In the past two days, a flurry of data and announcements have challenged common assumptions about artificial intelligence’s impact on the workforce. From surprising job market statistics to stories of companies hiring instead of firing, and from employee backlash to CEO candor and legal pushback, the evolving picture of AI at work is more nuanced than the usual headlines. Today’s briefing highlights the most significant and counterintuitive developments, offering senior leaders a clear-eyed look at how AI is truly reshaping roles, skills, and the rules of leading people through tech-driven change.

The job market paradox: AI’s impact in real numbers

Major employers are indeed using AI to streamline operations, with some high-profile job cuts as a result. In recent days, Oracle revealed it has slashed 21,000 jobs in the past year - about 13% of its workforce - and explicitly cited AI adoption as a key factor in those layoffs (techcrunch.com [1]). According to one outplacement analysis, a total of 49,000 U.S. job cuts have been attributed to AI just in the first half of 2026, putting this year on track to exceed the 55,000 AI-related layoffs seen in all of 2025 (www.entrepreneur.com [2]). These figures affirm that AI-driven automation is already having a tangible impact on employment.

However, the data also reveal that the situation is more complex than a simple story of mass unemployment. Goldman Sachs analysts estimate that while roughly 25,000 U.S. positions are being automated by AI each month, about 9,000 new jobs are created in that same time - leading to a net loss of around 16,000 jobs monthly in 2026. The displacement is real but not as apocalyptic as some feared. In fact, long-term projections even suggest AI could be a net creator of jobs - if companies and workers can adapt.

The World Economic Forum’s latest forecast underscores this nuanced outlook. The WEF projects that by 2030, about 92 million jobs globally may be displaced by AI, yet roughly 170 million new roles could be generated. That’s a net gain in jobs overall, assuming people are equipped with the skills to fill those new positions. And in some regions, the immediate disruption hasn’t fully materialised. A new International Labour Organisation study of 11 countries in Southeast Asia found that while 23% of current jobs have some exposure to generative AI, only 3.3% of workers are in occupations at the highest risk of automation - and it reported “no evidence to date of large-scale job losses” due to AI (www.ilo.org [3]) (www.ilo.org [4]). This suggests that the evolution of work under AI is unfolding more gradually and unevenly than doomsday predictions - giving leaders a window to prepare.

One counterintuitive trend emerging in the data is that early-career workers may be more vulnerable to AI's disruptions than their senior colleagues in certain fields. A recent analysis by Stanford University researchers found that between late 2022 and mid-2025, entry-level employment in some of the most AI-exposed occupations - such as software engineering and customer service - declined by roughly 20%, even as employment for older workers in those same roles actually grew during that period (www.cbsnews.com [5]). Overall, U.S. workers aged 22 - 25 in highly AI-exposed sectors experienced a 6% drop in employment, while their older coworkers saw employment rise by 6 - 9% (www.cbsnews.com [6]). The researchers suggest that more experienced employees have acquired "tacit knowledge" and human-centric skills that aren't easily replicated by current AI systems, which makes employers less inclined to replace them (www.cbsnews.com [7]). This generational disparity in impact highlights how AI is shifting the demand towards skills that typically come with experience - a critical insight for workforce planning.

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New roles and redesigned workflows: AI as a team player

Even as some firms trim headcount, others are reimagining work in ways that *add* jobs. One Silicon Valley company, Box, is bucking the AI layoff trend by building an entirely new workforce architecture around the technology (www.livemint.com [1]). Rather than reduce staff, the cloud content management provider created 13 new types of roles specifically because of AI - and is hiring more people as a result (www.livemint.com [2]). Box now employs over 2,900 workers and expects to surpass 3,000 employees by early next year, directly attributing this growth to its dual strategy with AI: both selling AI-powered products and using AI internally to boost productivity (www.livemint.com [3]).

The new AI-related roles at Box span a wide range of functions, many of which didn't exist anywhere in the industry just a couple of years ago. Among the positions Box has added are an 'AI architect', an 'AI solutions manager', an 'AI platform leader', and even a Senior Director of AI, Data and Integration - a role created to "wire together" Box's internal systems and data so employees can effectively use AI tools in their daily work (www.livemint.com [4]). The company is also hiring forward-deployed engineers to help customers implement AI, AI business automation specialists to streamline internal processes, and AI model evaluators to test and validate new AI systems. These aren't just cosmetic title changes for existing jobs, but fundamentally new functions designed to integrate AI deeply into the business.

Globally, other leading organisations are starting to make similar moves to adapt their teams and workflows. At the World Economic Forum's 2026 meeting in Davos, 25 major companies - including tech firms like Cisco and ServiceNow - committed to a joint initiative aimed at expanding AI access and digital skills to reach over 120 million workers by 2030 (aimagazine.com [5]). This coalition explicitly focuses on creating new "AI-native" roles and career pathways, recognising that unlocking

AI’s potential at scale will require re-training and empowering people worldwide, not just installing technology.

Forward-looking executives argue that the real gains from AI will come when businesses fundamentally rethink processes and roles. Nathan Jokel, a strategy leader at Cisco, observed that the "greatest transformation will come as organisations redesign workflows from the ground up around AI" and invest in advanced AI skills across their teams (aimagazine.com [6]). Rather than simply layering AI on top of existing routines, these companies are redesigning jobs to let humans focus on what they do best - whether it’s creativity, complex problem-solving or relationship-building - while delegating repetitive and data-intensive tasks to AI.

The results of such human-centric redesigns are already proving striking. In one case highlighted by the WEF, a company used AI to analyse months of tax regulations and financial data, uncovering $120 /million in savings and cutting a complex tax filing process from weeks down to just three days (aimagazine.com [7]). Another firm leveraged AI to handle a routine laboratory supply ordering procedure, reducing a 30-minute task to mere seconds and freeing up about 30,000 employee hours per year (aimagazine.com [8]). Beyond these efficiency wins, leaders are even envisioning AI as a true "team member" in the future. As ServiceNow’s Chief Strategy Officer Hala Zeine predicted, organisations will soon incorporate AI agents into their org charts as *virtual employees* working alongside humans, complete with defined responsibilities and performance metrics (aimagazine.com [9]). It’s a bold vision of hybrid human-AI teams that underscores how deeply workflows may be transformed.

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Employee sentiment: resistance, resentment & adaptation

Despite the productivity promises of AI, many employees on the front lines are feeling anxiety and resistance during this rapid transition. New workforce surveys from 2025 and 2026 reveal that employees aren’t rejecting *AI* itself so much as how it’s being implemented. Often, workers are being asked to use unfamiliar AI tools with little training or input, and they fear that leadership sees automation as a replacement for their judgment rather than a support. It’s no surprise that these conditions leave many people worried about their future and sceptical of the “AI will make your job easier” message.

Indeed, a Gallup workforce poll found that most knowledge workers who were required to use a new AI tool at work actually reported neutral or even negative effects on their productivity in the first six months. Similarly, a 2025 Pew Research Centre study found a majority of U.S. employees feel worried, overwhelmed, or unconvinced about AI's role in their everyday duties - feelings that grew "sharply" when the AI adoption was mandated from above rather than introduced with choice and support. This suggests that workers need time, training, and a clear understanding of how AI will help (rather than replace) them in order to fully embrace it.

One major challenge is the breakneck pace of change. Unlike prior workplace innovations like email or cloud software, which rolled out gradually, generative AI is being deployed company-wide in a matter of months in many organisations. That compressed timeline often leaves employees without the usual adjustment period to integrate new tools into their routines. Many workers today feel rushed and underprepared - and increasingly doubt whether their leaders understand the practical realities and unintended side effects of these AI deployments.

When AI tools are imposed without sufficient clarity or training, the fallout on morale and culture is real. Employees speak of a growing "AI tax" - the extra hours spent checking, correcting, and explaining the mistakes made by supposedly time-saving AI systems. If an AI tool creates more busywork or errors that humans must fix, people naturally become frustrated and start to disengage. Surveys indicate workers in AI-intensive workplaces are now more likely to consider leaving for companies with a better tech culture. Recruiters even report that job postings heavy on mandatory AI tool use are commanding 5 - 8% higher salaries, a "friction premium" to compensate for the perceived added burdens and stress of those roles.

The good news is that thoughtful change management can make a decisive difference. A 2026 study in MIT Sloan Management Review found that organisations which rolled out AI with robust support - hands-on training, clear policies on tool use, and soliciting employee feedback - saw employee engagement remain steady. In stark contrast, companies that skipped these steps and simply imposed automation from the top saw noticeable drops in job satisfaction and spikes in voluntary turnover in the months after deployment. In short, how you introduce AI is as important as the technology itself. Employees respond far better when they are supported and involved in the changes, reinforcing that successful AI adoption requires a people-centric approach.

Bridging the skills gap: upskilling takes Centre stage

As AI reshapes job requirements, another urgent challenge has come into focus: a growing skills and capability gap. A newly released industry analysis warns that over 90% of enterprises will face critical shortages in AI-related skills by 2026, a deficit that could risk an estimated $5.5 /trillion in unrealised annual productivity gains worldwide (iternal.ai [1]). From expertise in areas like prompt engineering and data governance to the 'soft' skills needed to interpret and implement AI outputs, demand for new competencies is far outpacing supply.

Likewise, the workforce at large will require significant re-skilling in the years ahead. The World Economic Forum reports that 59% of the global workforce - around 120 million workers - will need upskilling or reskilling by 2030 to meet the demands of an AI-powered economy (iternal.ai [2]). Yet alarmingly, the same analysis estimates that about 1 in 10 of those workers may not receive the training they need in time (iternal.ai [3]). This gap between the skills required and the training available risks leaving many employees behind and many companies without the talent to realise AI's potential.

In response, leading organisations are ramping up education and training initiatives to future-proof their talent. Just this week, PwC announced the launch of a “Learning Collective” - an ecosystem of accelerated learning programmes and new career paths tailored for the AI age (www.pwc.com [4]). This effort emphasises blending technical AI know-how with human skills like adaptability, creativity, and judgment, acknowledging that true competitive advantage comes from people who can effectively work alongside AI, not just from the technology itself (www.pwc.com [5]).

Other companies are also investing heavily in their people rather than relying solely on hiring new talent from outside. For instance, American Express recently rolled out new AI training and scholarship programmes in partnership with nonprofits, aiming to help small business owners and employees build practical AI skills for the modern economy (www.businesswire.com [6]). In the tech sector, industry leaders like IBM have pledged to upskill huge numbers of workers (IBM plans to train 2 million people in AI by 2026) (futurumgroup.com [7]). And through the WEF’s AI Reskilling Commitment, dozens of firms are providing free AI skills courses to millions of individuals worldwide. These initiatives are not just corporate philanthropy - they are strategic necessities. Companies recognise that without a bold talent development strategy, the promise of AI could be left on the table.

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Leadership and policy: driving responsible AI Integration

As AI moves from pilot projects to core business strategy, CEOs and boards are finding that leadership approach and governance make a critical difference. Some executives are speaking out to temper extremes and reset expectations. This week, Nvidia’s CEO Jensen Huang - head of one of the world’s most valuable AI companies - bluntly criticised peers for using AI as a convenient justification for layoffs, calling that narrative “just too lazy” (www.entrepreneur.com [1]). He urged fellow leaders to take a more balanced view, openly acknowledging AI’s limitations and the need for safeguards, rather than framing every cost cut as an "AI-driven" inevitability (www.entrepreneur.com [2]). Huang’s remarks, which quickly went viral in leadership circles, highlight the importance of honest communication about why and how companies are pursuing AI-driven changes.

Boards of directors, meanwhile, are grappling with their own oversight responsibilities in this fast-evolving landscape. Many boardrooms have begun to discuss AI risks and ethics, but surveys indicate only a minority of boards have put formal governance frameworks or metrics in place to guide AI use and monitor its impact on the workforce (www.wilmerhale.com [3]). Investors and regulators are paying closer attention: in Europe, labour unions and policymakers argue that the EU’s upcoming AI Act doesn’t sufficiently address workplace issues, prompting calls for new laws setting minimum standards for “algorithmic” management and monitoring of employees (www.europarl.europa.eu [4]762323_EN.pdf#:~:text=Addressing%20AI%20risks%20in%20the,algorithmic%20systems%20in%20the%20workplace)). Forward-thinking companies are responding by establishing AI ethics committees, updating AI usage policies, and involving HR leadership in technology oversight. The goal is to ensure

AI tools are implemented in ways that align with organisational values and avoid unintended harm to employees.

When companies push AI too far, too fast, they may also face direct legal challenges. In the last 48 hours, Meta's management was hit with a lawsuit by 26 employees seeking to halt a round of AI-informed layoffs. The complaint alleges that Meta used an AI-driven employee monitoring and productivity scoring system to decide who would be laid off, unfairly disadvantaging workers on medical or family leave. Meta has denied that AI was used to make the layoff decisions, but the lawsuit itself underscores a broader point: if staff suspect that unseen algorithms are making life-and-death career decisions, trust can evaporate and companies may end up in court. Leaders are being put on notice that transparency and fairness in how AI is deployed - especially in HR processes - are not just ethical niceties, but necessary to avoid lawsuits and reputational damage.

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Human+AI: why some firms soar while others stumble

All these recent developments point to a widening gap between organisations that successfully integrate AI alongside their people and those that struggle. Companies that treat AI as a tool to empower their workforce are seeing impressive results. According to PwC's 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer, the most AI-enabled companies have grown their headcounts by 52% (since 2018) compared to 36% growth at less AI-focused peers, and have enjoyed faster wage growth as well (www.pwc.com [1]). More dramatically, the top 20% of "AI leader" firms - so-called "super-stars" - achieved average labour productivity gains of 163% in recent years, nearly five times higher than other businesses (www.pwc.com [2]). These organisations are not necessarily those with the fanciest algorithms, but those that paired technology innovation with strategic workforce development. By using AI to amplify expert employees and create new value, they are pulling far ahead of competitors.

On the other hand, enterprises that approach AI primarily as a cost-cutting or staff replacement tool are encountering serious pitfalls. In theory, automating work should save money - but in practice, many who took a blunt "lay off and replace with AI" approach are now backtracking. In fact, roughly 29% of companies that eliminated roles due to AI have already rehired people for those same positions when the technology couldn't fully deliver (www.forbes.com [3]). And over half (55%) of executives who went heavy on AI-driven layoffs report regretting the decision within 18 months (www.forbes.com [4]). Such reversals carry financial and organisational costs. One analysis found that replacing a $55,000-per-year employee with an AI solution only to later rehire a person for that role often means paying the new hire around $75,000 - because now the job requires not just the original duties but also overseeing the AI system's output (www.forbes.com [5]). This "layoff and rehire" cycle can end up eroding morale, institutional knowledge, and the bottom line all at once.

What differentiates the success stories from the stumbles? A recurring theme is that winning organisations lead their AI transformations *with* their people, not against them. As one HR tech CEO put it, employers who treat automation as a partnership with employees - rather than a mandate to cut headcount - "will win the talent race" in the long run. Companies that position AI as a supportive tool and actively involve staff in the implementation tend to see stronger adoption and sustained

performance improvements. Those that fail to do so often undermine trust and lose valuable talent, negating any short-term efficiency gains. Ultimately, navigating the future of work with AI requires an honest, human-centred change strategy. Leaders who invest in upskilling their teams, redesign jobs to leverage both human and AI strengths, and maintain open dialogue will not only avoid losing people - they will likely attract and retain the talent needed to truly thrive in the AI era.

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Key Statistics

- Top 20% of AI-forward companies saw 163% productivity growth since 2018, nearly 5× the gains of other firms ([www.pwc.com](https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2026/pwc-2026-ai-jobs-barometer.html#:~:text=companies%20achieved%20average%20labour%20productivity,in))
- IDC: 90% of enterprises will face critical AI skills shortages by 2026 (risking $5.5 trillion in lost productivity) ([iternal.ai](https://iternal.ai/ai-skills-gap#:~:text=effectively,%E2%80%94%20not%20just%20technical%20skills))
- 29% of organisations that cut jobs due to AI have rehired for those positions within a year ([www.forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com/sites/terdawn-deboe/2026/05/21/companies-fired-workers-for-ai-now-they-want-them-back/#:~:text=of%2029,currently%20are%20inside%20this%2018))
- 55% of executives who replaced employees with AI regret the decision within 18 months ([www.forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com/sites/terdawn-deboe/2026/05/21/companies-fired-workers-for-ai-now-they-want-them-back/#:~:text=of%2029,currently%20are%20inside%20this%2018))

KEY TAKEAWAY

Leaders: treat AI as a tool to amplify employees, not replace them. Companies that invest in upskilling and integrate AI as a teammate are outperforming peers ([www.pwc.com](https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2026/pwc-2026-ai-jobs-barometer.html#:~:text=companies%20achieved%20average%20labour%20productivity,in)), while knee-jerk AI-driven layoffs risk talent loss and legal backlash.

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