The Human Impact of A.I.

In recent years, the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) has captured the world's imagination—and its wallet. Billions of dollars are being poured into the development of A.I. technologies, and the results are undeniable. From healthcare to finance, manufacturing to creative industries, A.I. is transforming the way we work, live, and interact. Just look to the news of recent days, where China has shown how the launch of one product (in this case, DeepSeek) can impact global markets, news cycles and approaches to A.I. around the world. Yet, amidst the fanfare and innovation, critical questions remain largely unaddressed: How will A.I. impact the human workforce and what are we doing to mitigate it? There are many individuals and organisations pointing this out:

AI technologies can deepen existing divides and inequalities in the world - UNESCO

People who use AI will replace people who don't – Andrew Ng (at 1:50)

Sometimes, there's even outright optimism. While WEF said that 80 million jobs may be lost to A.I., they felt that:

{talking about by 2025] ...*97 million new roles may emerge that are more adapted to the new division of labour.* World Economic Forum 2020

I challenge anyone to find the nearly 100 million new jobs generated because of A.I.!

While many have voiced concerns about the effects of A.I. on workers—job displacement, skill gaps, and the erosion of traditional roles—the conversation often stops at hand-wringing and recommendations. In many cases, the real investment in addressing these challenges has been woefully inadequate. It's as if we've collectively thrown up our hands and said, "Well, what can we do?" But this passive approach is not only insufficient—it's irresponsible. If we can invest billions in developing A.I., why can't we invest equally in the people who will navigate this new world of work? In fact, it wasn't that long ago (2020) that Microsoft CEO, Satya Nadella, "envisioned a near future where jobs are "enriched by productivity."" How is this even possible without investment in how this future will pan out for the worker?

The A.I. Revolution: A Double-Edged Sword

There's no denying the transformative potential of A.I. It can automate repetitive tasks, analyse vast amounts of data in seconds, and even generate creative content. These capabilities have the power to boost productivity, drive innovation, and solve complex problems. However, this progress comes at a cost. As A.I. systems become more sophisticated, they are increasingly capable of performing tasks traditionally done by humans. This has led to fears of widespread job displacement, particularly in industries reliant on routine or manual work. I can point to many, but one great example is the insurance industry. The thousands of people in the background managing claims, dealing with policies will see their jobs eventually replaced by A.I.. In fact, even 2 years ago, 62% of carriers, were expecting to cut staff due to A.I. I suspect this could only but have grown in the intervening time.

But the impact of A.I. goes beyond job losses. It's also reshaping the skills required in the workplace. Workers are expected to adapt to new technologies, often with little support or training. This creates a growing divide between those who can keep pace with technological change and those who risk being left behind. Without meaningful investment in upskilling and reskilling, this divide will only widen, exacerbating inequality and social unrest.

The Missing Investment in Workers

Make no mistake. There is investment going on. Countries like Canada and here in Singapore have put initiatives to upskill workers; and companies like Amazon, Microsoft and others have put money into skills development. My issue is twofold: first of all, the focus in training seems to be in service of A.I., meaning "free training to help develop digital skills" at Google, or let's consider Amazon's $1.2 billion budget ($4,000 per employee), which is massive, but with the stated aim of helping staff become "knowledgeable and comfortable with working with and around the machinery to keep these robots moving, working properly".

Secondly, the disparity between investment in A.I. and investment in workers is staggering. Consider this: if the same level of resources and urgency were applied to the development of A.I., as was spent on addressing its human impact, we'd still be working on Windows '98. Yet, while A.I. has leapt forward at breakneck speed, the

response to its societal consequences has been sluggish at best. Specific examples: Canada's Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program, which will "provide new skills training for workers" allocates $50 million for training the population, while simultaneously allocating $2 billion to A.I. capabilities and infrastructure. Looking through research at Stanford, OECD and others, the estimated global government and private industry combined investment could be over $500 billion annually.

The question is, why? Why are we so willing to pour billions into machines but reluctant to invest in the people who operate them or, more importantly, will be replaced by A.I.? The answer lies in a fundamental misalignment of priorities. A.I. is seen as a driver of profit and efficiency, while the human impact is often viewed as a secondary concern—a problem to be dealt with later. But this short-sighted approach ignores the fact that workers are the backbone of every organisation. Without them, even the most advanced A.I. is useless. For now.

What Can Be Done? A Call for Action

The time for passive concern is over. What we need now is action—and investment. Here are four key areas where organisations, governments, and society must focus to address the human impact of A.I.:

1. Upskilling and Reskilling the Workforce

- The rapid pace of technological change means that many workers will need to learn new skills to remain relevant. Organisations must invest in comprehensive training programmes that equip employees with the technical and soft skills needed to thrive in an A.I.-driven world. This includes not only digital literacy but also critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence—skills that A.I. cannot replicate.

2. Creating a Culture of Lifelong Learning

- The days of learning a single skill and relying on it for an entire career are over. Workers must embrace a mindset of lifelong learning, and organisations must support this by providing access to continuous education and development opportunities. Governments can play a role by incentivising businesses to invest in their workforce and by funding public training initiatives.

3. Redesigning Work for Human-A.I. Collaboration

- Rather than viewing A.I. as a replacement for human workers, organisations should focus on how A.I. can augment human capabilities. This requires rethinking job roles and workflows to create synergies between humans and machines. For example, A.I. can handle data analysis, freeing up humans to focus on strategy, innovation, and customer relationships.

4. Ensuring Ethical and Inclusive A.I. Development

- The development of A.I. must be guided by ethical principles that prioritise the well-being of workers. This includes addressing biases in A.I. systems, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and involving workers in the design and implementation of A.I. technologies. By putting people at the centre of A.I. development, we can create systems that enhance, rather than undermine, human dignity and potential.

A Possible Future?

Imagine a world where the same level of investment and innovation that has gone into A.I. is directed towards empowering workers. Imagine a world where every worker has access to the training, resources, and support they need to adapt to technological change. Imagine a world where A.I. is not a threat but a tool for human flourishing.

I was speaking to an A.I. leader this past week and he asked, “so, what can we do?” I had to laugh because if I had the answer to that question, well, let’s just say my bank manager would be much happier! No, there are no magic answers. To find that out requires many minds working across many dimensions; just as it does in the development of the A.I. technologies.

This vision is not out of reach—but it requires a fundamental shift in priorities. We must move beyond talking about the human impact of A.I. and start investing in solutions. The workers who make organisations what they are deserve nothing less.

The rise of A.I. is one of the defining challenges of our time. While its potential is immense, so too are the risks it poses to workers around the world. The current

imbalance between investment in A.I. and investment in people is unsustainable. If we are to build a future that is equitable, inclusive, and prosperous, we must prioritise the human impact of A.I. with the same urgency and resources that we have devoted to its development.

The choice is ours: we can either wring our hands and hope for the best, or we can take action and invest in the people who will shape the future of work. The time to act is now.

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