



AI AND WORK

September 2026

AI will not eliminate jobs, it will destroy complexity-based rents

Christophe GAIE, Jean LANGLOIS-BERTHELOT

SKEMA PUBLIKA

SKEMA Publika is SKEMA Business School's international think tank. It analyses major social, economic, technological and geopolitical changes to inform public and private decisionmaking. Drawing on the school's research and on scientifically validated external contributions, the think tank fuels public debate and issues recommendations for national and international decision-makers.

SKEMA Publika takes an interdisciplinary and international approach, enriched by SKEMA's global network of campuses and a community of experts from the academic and professional worlds. This international dimension is not simply a network, but a way of thinking. SKEMA Publika therefore connects local dynamics with global transformations to provide a decentralised and multipolar perspective on the major challenges of our time, rather than one centred on a single national lens.

The views expressed in this text are those of the authors alone.

© All rights reserved, SKEMA Business School, 2026

Cover: 'a computer circuit board with a brain on it'. Steve A Johnson. Unsplash.com

SKEMA Publika

SKEMA Business School, Grand Paris Campus
5 Quai Marcel Dassault – PO Box 90067
92156 Suresnes Cedex, France

Tel.: +33 1 71 13 39 32
Email: publika@skema.edu
Website: www.publika.skema.edu

COLLECTION

“Exploring the grey areas of geopolitics, digital technology and global risks.”

The publications in the “Uncertainties” series analyse tensions, emerging risks and dynamics of instability globally

EDITORS

Frédérique Vidal is Director of Development at SKEMA Publika and Director of Strategy and Scientific Impact at SKEMA Business School. A full professor of Biology, she was president of the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis from 2012 to 2017, and subsequently served as minister of higher education, research and innovation in the Philippe and Castex governments from 2017 to 2022. She served as special advisor to the President of EFMD and is currently also the Permanent Representative of the Principality of Monaco to the United Nations Environment Programme and the Whaling Commission.

Sean Scull, Think Tank Project Manager, is a doctoral candidate in Information and Communication Science at Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier III. He holds a degree in Political Science with a specialisation in International Relations from the University of Gothenburg, and a Master’s degree in International Politics with a focus on Anglophone politics from the University of Toulon. Sean has lived and worked in Sweden and the United States.

AUTHORS

Jean Langlois-Berthelot works at Kannon Labs, where he focuses on simulation, decision intelligence and technology assessment applied to strategic environments. He is currently a visiting professor at the Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Palermo and is working on experiments conducted as part of the Orion 26 military exercise.

Christophe Gaie is Deputy Director of the Digital Operations Division at AP-HP and an associate member of the Magellan Lyon 3 laboratory. Previously, he was Head of the Digital Engineering and Innovation Division within the Prime Minister's Office, and he also served as Head of the Digital Applications Office at the Interministerial Centre for IT Services relating to Human Resources (CISIRH). Prior to that, he was in charge of the interministerial exchange platform within the Interministerial Directorate for Digital Affairs (DINUM). In addition, he worked for over ten years at the Directorate-General of Public Finance (DGFIP), first as an IT architect and then as head of the team responsible for Income Tax and Pay-as-You-Earn. He obtained his PhD in Telecommunications from the University of Paris-Sud - Saclay, following his dual degree in Engineering and Research Master's at INP Bordeaux – University of Bordeaux I. His main areas of research include e-Government, the modernisation of Information and Telecommunications Systems, the development and use of APIs, Artificial Intelligence and fraud detection.

ABSTRACT

The debate on the impact of artificial intelligence in the professional environment generally focuses on the transformation of employment: which jobs will be lost? Which jobs will be created? Will humans be replaced? In this paper, Christophe Gaie and Jean Langlois-Berthelot suggest an alternative perspective, namely that AI will put work to the test to reveal its true value. Admittedly, this change will lead to a future that will produce winners, losers, career changes, social conflicts, strategic errors and professional resistance. But it should be seen as an opportunity to distinguish substantive skills from procedures, robust professions from friction-inducing roles, productive organisations from heavy bureaucracies, and solid experts from those who merely churn out average documents. This will not be a transformation of work at the expense of human qualities; on the contrary, work in the age of AI will rely entirely on humans and their cognitive, adaptive and emotional characteristics.

CONTENTS

Summary.....	i
Introduction.....	1
I. The limitations of the dominant discourse on work and AI.....	2
A. The debate on AI and employment is misguided	2
B. Beyond jobs under threat: transformed tasks	3
C. Labour market: not all employees will see their pay rise	4
D. The quality of work is not enough to absorb the shock	5
E. Complexity dividends: what artificial intelligence lays bare	6
II. Rethinking the adaptation of the labour market in the age of AI.....	7
A. Productivity and AI: reducing lead times and improving actual production capacity, not destroying jobs	7
B. Businesses and AI: Reducing friction without undermining skills	8
C. Competition, platforms and regulation: avoiding new AI-driven rent- seeking	9
III. Recommendations.....	10
Conclusion	11

INTRODUCTION

A study by Coface and the Observatory of Threatened and Emerging Jobs estimates that, with the use of artificial intelligence (AI), nearly 5 million jobs in France are at risk by the end of the decade¹. Employment, productivity, skills, automation: the real impact will not only be social, but also economic, in that it will force every role, every profession and every organisation to prove its true value in order to avoid being replaced by AI. Contrary to alarmist theories predicting the end of work, we argue that artificial intelligence is instead putting work to the test to demonstrate its true value. Indeed, this new technology will force organisations to scrutinise their value chain: areas requiring skill will be enhanced; those characterised by friction, slowness or complexity-driven rent-seeking will be exposed and replaced. Thus, the question we will address is as follows:

How can we ensure that the transformation of work driven by AI unleashes talent rather than protecting rent-seeking or reinforcing monopolies?

In the first section, we will analyse why the dominant discourse on work and AI is open to criticism. In the second section, we will describe how to rethink the adaptation of the labour market in the age of AI. In the third section, we will put forward recommendations for public policy.

¹ De Calignon, G. (2026). AI: the major upheaval ahead for the labour market. Les Echos. <https://www.lesechos.fr/monde/europe/ia-le-grand-bouleversement-a-venir-du-marche-du-travail-2221760>

I. THE LIMITS OF THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE ON WORK AND AI

A. THE DEBATE ON AI AND EMPLOYMENT IS MISGUIDED

The public debate on artificial intelligence in the workplace initially centred on a fear that AI would lead to massive job losses. This fear is legitimate and well-founded, and therefore effective. It pits the prophets of the end of work against the optimists who foresee a resurgence in productivity. But it remains too limited to describe what is actually happening in businesses, government departments, consultancy firms, the professional services sector and the service industries. Indeed, the current trend is, in a sense, a step back from certain somewhat hasty experiments (with, in some cases, up to 32 per cent of those whose jobs had been replaced by AI being rehired²).

Major technological waves do not always replace entire professions. They break down activities, transform tasks, reshape skills and shift value. AI accelerates this trend because it affects language, synthesis, documentary research, writing, coding, analysis, translation, customer support and even the production of materials. It is therefore moving to the very heart of cognitive work. It does not merely affect factories or administrative offices; it is encroaching on roles that were thought to be protected by qualifications, expertise, experience or a mastery of procedures.

A second perspective has emerged: the real issue is not the destruction of jobs, but the transformation of tasks and the quality of work. This view is more accurate. Task-based approaches are now central to the work of the IMF, the ILO, the OECD and recent economic literature³ . They avoid confusing exposure to technology with the immediate elimination of a job and highlight that the same tool can empower a professional, speed up a routine, standardise an activity or reduce a degree of autonomy.

We have seen several waves of digitalisation in which tech giants have used low-cost digital models to replace traditional players. This is known as the “Amazon effect”. Amazon has replaced physical bookshops, Netflix has replaced video rental shops, and Kodak has disappeared with the advent of digital

² Robert Half recruitment agency website. AI Adoption and Workforce Impact: Navigating the AI Era in 2026. <https://www.roberthalf.com/us/en/insights/navigating-ai-adoption>

³ IMF, Gen-AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work, Staff Discussion Note, 2024. <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/staff-discussion-notes/issues/2024/01/14/gen-ai-artificial-intelligence-and-the-future-of-work-542379>

ILO, Generative AI and Jobs: A Refined Global Index of Occupational Exposure, Working Paper, 2025. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/generative-ai-and-jobs-refined-global-index-occupational-exposure>

Eloundou, T., Manning, S., Mishkin, P., Rock, D., ‘GPTs are GPTs: An Early Look at the Labour Market Impact Potential of Large Language Models’, 2023. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2303.10130>

photography⁴. Whilst major digital corporations highlight the creation of numerous jobs and human-machine collaboration, automation ultimately destroys more jobs than it creates and drives down wages across the sector. AI would apply this same logic, no longer to retail or logistics, but to intellectual professions and services.

So how can we protect the value created by human labour? This first requires identifying the form of work that deserves protection. Indeed, not every existing task creates value, not every professional complexity constitutes a skill, and not every skilled role is inherently productive. Part of contemporary work also relies on deadlines, layers of intermediation, formats, meetings, approvals, memos, *reporting*, mimetic compliance and navigating unnecessarily opaque systems.

The impact of AI is therefore more far-reaching than the usual debate suggests. It raises not only the question of how many jobs will be lost, but also which tasks still merit remuneration, which skills deserve protection, which organisations still justify their costs, and, finally, which professions have been partly sustained by a “complexity rent”. These questions concern all roles and all professions, including those in technical fields, since AI is now capable of generating computer code⁵, testing it and even deploying it autonomously via AI agents.

B. BEYOND JOBS AT RISK: TRANSFORMED TASKS

Whether it is simply generative or relies on autonomous agents, AI is first and foremost a technology for restructuring tasks. It writes, summarises, classifies, translates, compares, codes, explains, simulates, rephrases and assists. It does not replace lawyers, consultants, developers, communications specialists, research officers or administrative managers. It takes over fragments of their work that involve basic, repetitive tasks. In other words, AI produces a first draft, a preparatory note, a comparative table, market intelligence, a standard response, a script, sales materials or a summary. This point is crucial because if we think solely in terms of job roles, we fail to see the real transformation. A job may remain officially stable whilst its content changes profoundly. A role may retain its title whilst losing the tasks that required judgement. An organisation may maintain its workforce whilst shifting the intelligence behind the process to models, platforms, service providers or proprietary systems. Empirical studies are already showing significant productivity gains in certain contexts. In customer support, access to an AI assistant increases agents’ average productivity and is particularly beneficial to less experienced staff⁶. In professional writing tasks, the use of ChatGPT reduces completion time and

⁴ Feichin Ted Tschang and Esteve Almirall, 2021: Artificial Intelligence as Augmenting Automation: Implications for Employment. AMP, 35, 642–659, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2019.0062>

⁵ Hananto, A., Hasibuan, N. S., Olivia, S., Tukino, T., & Novalia, E. (2025). The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Programmer Jobs: Threat or Opportunity?. JUSIFO (Jurnal Sistem Informasi), 11(1), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.19109/jusifo.v11i1.25082>

⁶ Brynjolfsson, E., Li, D., Raymond, L., Generative AI at Work, Quarterly Journal of Economics, 2025. <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article/140/2/889/7990658>

improves the average quality of output⁷. Research by Microsoft Research, based on real-world use of Copilot, indicates that information-related activities, writing, teaching, consultancy and communication are among the areas most directly affected⁸.

However, these results do not prove that AI will replace everything. They do prove that whole sections of standard output are becoming less costly. First drafts, standard summaries, generic memos, tailored emails, functional translations, preparatory tables, presentation materials and preliminary analyses are no longer rare. What used to be billed as human time is sometimes becoming an automated output that humans need only to check, enhance and take responsibility for.

The question raised by this new reality is that of the place of human value. AI challenges economic models based on billing for time spent, which previously allowed for the inclusion of human time (technology monitoring, training, informal discussions, etc.). It no longer facilitates the integration of junior staff or the transfer of knowledge as easily, since passing on one's experience means depriving oneself of a rare asset necessary to keep one's job.

C. LABOUR MARKET: NOT ALL EMPLOYEES WILL RECEIVE A PAY RISE

The AI labour market will not be uniform. Recent reports from the IMF, the ILO, the WEF and PwC all agree on one point: exposure will be high, but the effects will be polarised⁹. Some roles will see gains in productivity, pay and autonomy. Others will be standardised, monitored or made more replaceable.

AI is creating a new hierarchy. At the top are those who design, own or control the models, data, infrastructure and interfaces. Next come those who use AI to start businesses, sell, make decisions, produce more quickly and become more autonomous. Then there are those who work under AI: employees who are assessed, directed, scheduled or monitored by systems over which they have

⁷ Noy, S., Zhang, W., 'Experimental Evidence on the Productivity Effects of Generative Artificial Intelligence', **Science**, 2023. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adh2586>

⁸ Tomlinson, K., Jaffe, S., Wang, W., Counts, S., Suri, S., 'Working with AI: Measuring the Applicability of Generative AI to Occupations', Microsoft Research, 2025. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2507.07935>

⁹ IMF, Gen-AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work, Staff Discussion Note, 2024. <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/staff-discussion-notes/issues/2024/01/14/gen-ai-artificial-intelligence-and-the-future-of-work-542379>

ILO, Generative AI and Jobs: A Refined Global Index of Occupational Exposure, Working Paper, 2025. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/generative-ai-and-jobs-refined-global-index-occupational-exposure>

World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2025. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>

PwC, 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer, 2026. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/services/ai/ai-jobs-barometer.html>

no control. Finally, there are those whose value rested primarily on procedures, formats or access privileges.

The issue of junior staff will be particularly challenging. If entry-level tasks are automated, how does one still learn? If AI produces the initial research, the first draft, the first summary, the first line of code, the first outline, what scope for training remains? Recent reports on job vacancies already point to a rise in the skills required for certain entry-level roles, with increased expectations regarding judgement, leadership, creativity and communication¹⁰. The market may expect beginners to behave like professionals who have already been “enhanced”.

AI therefore does not merely eliminate tasks. It transforms career paths. It changes the way we enter a profession, the way we learn, the way we progress and the way we prove our worth. It can fast-track the right candidates whilst making access more difficult for others. The real issue is not merely the protection of existing jobs; it is the reconstruction of skills pathways.

This risk of a break in the training chain for new staff directly threatens the intergenerational transfer of expertise. By outsourcing to language models the routine tasks that were often used to learn the trade, organisations risk preventing newcomers from gaining an understanding of their profession and developing their operational intuition¹¹. Without a proactive commitment to implementing new forms of guided learning, organisations could face significant recruitment difficulties and may ultimately prove unable to replenish their pool of experts.

D. WORK QUALITY ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH TO ABSORB THE SHOCK

The discussion on the quality of work is necessary. AI can devalue jobs, reduce autonomy, intensify work rates, turn employees into mere validators of automated outputs, leave junior staff vulnerable and shift responsibility onto people who no longer have full control over the entire production chain. The risks of opacity, algorithmic surveillance, occupational health and *accountability* are documented by the OECD, notably in its work on algorithmic management¹². But the quality of work cannot become a defensive mantra that enshrines all existing tasks. Work has social, psychological and political value, but this does not mean that every task deserves to be preserved. A society that protects

¹⁰ PwC, 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer, 2026. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/services/ai/ai-jobs-barometer.html>

¹¹ Morandini, S., Fraboni, F., De Angelis, M., Puzzo, G., Giusino, D., & Pietrantoni, L. (2023). The impact of artificial intelligence on workers' skills: Upskilling and reskilling in organisations. *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline*, 26, 39–68. <https://doi.org/10.28945/5078>

¹² OECD, Algorithmic Management in the Workplace, OECD Artificial Intelligence Papers, 2025. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/algorithmic-management-in-the-workplace_287c13c4-en.html

everything that exists in the name of the quality of work also protects the useless, the slow, the redundant and the captive.

The challenge is to distinguish between three categories. Firstly, tasks that create almost no value: reports that are rarely read, repetitive formatting, superfluous validations, generic summaries, artificial coordination, and documentation produced to satisfy a procedure rather than to inform a decision. Next, tasks that must be automated because they free up time for analysis, relationship-building, innovation, sales, or simply deliver efficiency gains. Finally, “high value-added” tasks must be protected because they develop judgement, build trust, convey a professional culture or entail responsibility.

Defending jobs is reasonable and rational when it is based on this hierarchy. It is more questionable when it refuses to recognise that certain roles were merely transaction costs, disguised as professions. In short, AI does not threaten jobs; it threatens the ability of certain activities to justify themselves by their institutional existence alone.

This is a process very similar to the digitisation carried out, for example, on Impots.gouv¹³ : the first websites simply replicated the traditional tax return form, yet using digital technology to do things “just like on paper” is entirely sub-optimal. What is important is to transform public administration to make it more efficient and more useful for citizens, by utilising the information held from previous years (address, names and ages of children, etc.) as well as other data sources (income from employment, investment income, etc.). Similarly, AI should not replicate the work carried out by humans but rather help them to focus on the tasks that only they can perform, namely ‘high value-added’ tasks.

E. COMPLEXITY RENTS: WHAT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE LAYS BARE

A complexity rent arises when a player derives their value less from what they produce than from their ability to navigate a complexity that they sometimes help to maintain. This rent exists in large organisations, public administrations, regulated professions, consultancy, compliance, certain coordination roles and some support functions. It is fuelled by procedures, interfaces, standards, formats, specialised language and information asymmetries.

AI directly targets these areas. It reduces the cost of understanding a document. It speeds up access to a summary. It makes it easier to compare tenders, contracts, standards or public policies. It enables an individual to produce a monitoring report, a memo, an analysis or a support document that previously only larger organisations could produce at a reasonable cost. It does not eliminate deep expertise. It undermines average expertise that thrived on access, billable hours, jargon and artificial scarcity.

This is where the debate takes an economic turn. AI does not merely destroy jobs; it destroys productive excuses. It asks every activity: are you a skill or a

¹³ DGFIP website. The online data reporting procedure. [impots.gouv.fr. https://www.impots.gouv.fr/la-procedure-de-declaration-en-ligne-des-donnees-efi](https://www.impots.gouv.fr/la-procedure-de-declaration-en-ligne-des-donnees-efi)

hindrance? Are you a rare capability or a costly interface? Do you produce a decision, a relationship, a risk-taking move, an invention, or just yet another document? This line of questioning is certainly brutal, but useful. Many organisations have become cumbersome because they have piled up layers of coordination to manage their own complexity. They have created roles to fix problems that they themselves had created. AI can serve to expose these hidden costs. It reveals which tasks existed to create value and which existed solely because the system was too difficult to navigate.

The real privilege of these “complexity rents” lay in cognitive asymmetry: possessing the jargon, mastering the administrative maze or knowing the exact format of the deliverable was enough to bar entry to the uninitiated. By instantly democratising the translation of this jargon and the adoption of these standards, AI tackles this ‘protectionism of form’. It radically levels the playing field: the prestige of a role can no longer be based on the opacity of its rules, but solely on its operational relevance and the concrete impact of the decisions it involves.

II. RETHINKING THE ADAPTATION OF THE LABOUR MARKET IN THE AGE OF AI

A. PRODUCTIVITY AND AI: REDUCING LEAD TIMES AND IMPROVING ACTUAL PRODUCTION CAPACITY, NOT DESTROYING JOBS

Productivity gains linked to AI will therefore not come solely from the replacement of jobs or tasks. They will come first and foremost from a drastic reduction in lead times, internal queues, search costs, drafting costs, coordination costs and the costs of superficial learning. In many professions, time is not lost in the decision-making process itself, but in the standardised preparation for that decision: gathering information, reformatting data, drafting an initial version, summarising documents, producing an interim report, or reworking a presentation.

If AI reduces these costs, it has the potential to unleash considerable economic energy. It enables competent individuals to produce on their own what previously required a small team. It enables an SME to access monitoring, documentation, marketing, analysis and support capabilities that were once reserved for larger organisations. It enables a freelancer to transform their expertise into a more industrialised offering. It can reduce the premium placed on bureaucratic scale.

This potential is significant. The most interesting promise of AI is not to replace salaried employment, but to disintermediate expertise. A skilled professional equipped with AI can compete with an average organisation. A small, highly productive team can erode the advantage of a large, sluggish corporation. An entrepreneur can test, document, sell, prototype, analyse and communicate with lower entry costs.

But this potential is not automatic. Daron Acemoglu points out that the macroeconomic effects of AI may remain modest if automation focuses on tasks of low social value, if the gains are overestimated, or if its applications merely substitute for human activities in a mediocre way rather than unlocking new capabilities¹⁴. David Autor, on the other hand, proposes a more productive approach: using AI to rebuild intermediate-skill jobs by empowering more workers to exercise the expert judgement previously reserved for highly qualified professionals¹⁵.

The common thread is clear: AI will only have lasting value if it increases actual productive capacity, not if it merely produces more texts, more slides and more organisational noise. However, there is a risk of a rebound effect, whereby “documentary inflation” could negate the benefits of AI¹⁶. Indeed, we must guard against bureaucratic innovation, as improving productivity requires not producing ten times as many documents at the same time.

B. BUSINESSES AND AI: REDUCING FRICTION WITHOUT DESTROYING SKILLS

For businesses, the pitfall lies in confusing automation with organisational intelligence. Replacing a task with an AI output does not necessarily create value. It may save time, but it can also lead to noise, errors, dependence on a tool, a loss of business knowledge or an invisible decline in quality.

The right strategy is to assess tasks according to their actual value. Low-value tasks must be eliminated or heavily automated. Repetitive but necessary tasks must be standardised. Tasks that foster learning must be rethought, not eliminated. Tasks requiring judgement must remain in the hands of people capable of understanding the data, the model’s limitations, the context and ultimate responsibility.

This distinction is essential. Automating junior tasks without overhauling internal training weakens the business in the medium term. Outsourcing process intelligence to a proprietary tool creates dependency. Replacing judgement with a score creates an illusion of rationality. Deploying AI solely to produce faster can damage the brand, customer relationships or operational quality.

The company that succeeds with AI will not be the one that has adopted the most tools. It will be the one that has understood which tasks are sources of friction, which are skills, and which are opportunities for learning. Sustainable gains will not come from blind automation. They will come from the ability to eliminate unnecessary costs whilst strengthening the skills that truly create

¹⁴ Acemoglu, D., The Simple Macroeconomics of AI, NBER Working Paper No. 32487, 2024. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w32487>

¹⁵ Autor, D., Applying AI to Rebuild Middle Class Jobs, NBER Working Paper No. 32140, 2024. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w32140>

¹⁶ König, Pascal, Artificial Slack – On the Efficiency Rebound Effects of Artificial Intelligence in Organisations (10 January 2026). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=6058995> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.6058995>

value. Making a strategic and visionary choice, by thinking outside the box (for example, through ‘edge innovation’¹⁷), will indeed remain a wholly human skill.

Transforming businesses therefore requires a thorough review of internal efficiency metrics to bring people and technology together. Measuring the success of an AI deployment by the number of hours saved or tools installed is a misleading indicator, often offset by the emergence of new, hidden costs associated with verification and maintenance. The most effective organisations will be those that measure AI by its ability to make relevant, reliable and rapid decisions in an uncertain context. They will need to prioritise the development of internal human capital to ensure that strategic judgement takes precedence over short-term budgetary gains.

C. COMPETITION, PLATFORMS AND REGULATION: AVOIDING NEW AI RENT-SEEKING

AI can lower barriers to entry, but it can also create new ones. Advanced models require computing power, data, talent, cloud infrastructure, global distribution and costly legal compliance. These conditions favour large players. A technology capable of disintermediating organisations can also reinforce a few dominant platforms.

The risk is straightforward: replacing old complexity-based rents with infrastructure-based rents. If a handful of players control the models, APIs, cloud services, standards, datasets, professional interfaces and marketplaces, then AI does not truly liberate labour. It merely shifts dependency. It takes power away from traditional organisations and transfers it to more powerful platforms.

Regulation should therefore avoid two mistakes. The first would be to hold back AI in the name of a blanket defence of existing jobs. This would protect old rent-seeking arrangements and slow down productivity gains. The second would be to impose compliance requirements so onerous that only large corporations could cope with them. This would lock the market in the name of security.

The right approach is more demanding: clear accountability, auditability, data portability, interoperability, a diversity of suppliers, limits on proprietary lock-ins, and transparency regarding critical dependencies. The aim is not to freeze the way work was done before AI. It is to ensure that the removal of old frictions does not create new forms of captivity.

Furthermore, the concentration of technological power in the hands of an oligopoly of model providers poses a risk of global cognitive standardisation¹⁸.

¹⁷ Bazalgette, D., Langlois-Berthelot, J., Gaie, C. (30 October 2024). ‘Edge innovation’: a creative approach to revealing the unexpected? Polytechnique Insights. <https://www.polytechnique-insights.com/tribunes/science/edge-innovation-une-approche-creative-pour-reveler-linattendu/>

¹⁸ Krasodonski, A. et al. (2024), Artificial intelligence and the challenge for global governance: Nine essays on achieving responsible AI, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://doi.org/10.55317/9781784136086>

When millions of businesses and professionals rely on the same generative architectures to analyse their markets, draft their contracts or devise their strategies, they expose themselves to an invisible homogenisation of their ways of thinking. Preserving economic sovereignty and competitive diversity therefore necessarily requires active support for open and sovereign AI ecosystems¹⁹, capable of limiting the negative effects associated with dependence on a handful of private actors.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The quality of work must not become a pretext for protecting all existing tasks and processes. Work has social, psychological and political value, but this does not mean that every task deserves to be preserved. A society that protects everything that exists in the name of the quality of work also protects what is useless, slow, redundant and restrictive. It does not allow for improvements in efficiency to deliver new services (in health, security, leisure, knowledge, etc.).

To protect the value created by human labour, organisations must distinguish between the forms of work that deserve protection and those that do not. The challenge lies in distinguishing between three categories. Firstly, tasks that create almost no value: reports that are rarely read, repetitive formatting, superfluous validations, generic summaries, artificial coordination, and documentation produced to satisfy a procedure rather than to inform a decision. Next, there are tasks that must be automated because they free up time for analysis, relationship-building, innovation and sales, or simply deliver efficiency gains. Finally, “high value-added” tasks must be protected because they develop judgement, build trust, convey a professional culture or entail a sense of responsibility.

Business transformation requires a thorough review of internal efficiency metrics to integrate people and technology. Measuring the success of an AI roll-out by the number of hours saved or tools installed is a misleading indicator, often offset by the emergence of new, hidden costs associated with verification and maintenance. The most effective organisations will be those that measure AI by its ability to make relevant, reliable and rapid decisions in an uncertain and complex context. They will need to prioritise the development of internal human capital to ensure that strategic judgement takes precedence over short-term budgetary gains.

The transformation of work through AI requires a proactive commitment to establishing new forms of guided learning. AI does not merely eliminate tasks; it changes the way people enter a profession, learn, progress and prove

¹⁹ Gaie, C., Denis, L. (20 March 2025). How open AI could modernise public services. Polytechnique Insights. <https://www.polytechnique-insights.com/tribunes/digital/comment-les-ia-libres-pourraient-moderniser-les-services-publics/>

their worth. It can accelerate the skills development of the best candidates whilst making access more difficult for others. The real issue is not just the protection of existing jobs; it is the reconstruction of skills pathways. The risk of a break in the training chain for new staff directly threatens the intergenerational transfer of know-how. By outsourcing to language models the routine tasks that often served as a means of learning the trade, organisations risk preventing newcomers from gaining an understanding of their profession and developing their operational intuition²⁰. Without a proactive commitment to implementing new forms of guided learning, organisations could face significant recruitment difficulties and may ultimately prove unable to renew their pool of experts. This would undermine the brand (or identity), customer relations or operational quality.

Regulation of AI must distinguish between the aspects of work that deserve protection and those that do not, whilst avoiding overly burdensome compliance requirements so as not to create new forms of lock-in. Indeed, curbing AI in the name of a general defence of existing tasks would protect entrenched interests and slow down productivity gains. However, imposing onerous compliance requirements would risk favouring large corporations, which could absorb the costs temporarily before passing them on. This would lock the market to the detriment of agile players by placing excessive emphasis on security at the expense of innovation. The correct course of action is more demanding: clear accountability, auditability, data portability, interoperability, a diversity of suppliers, limiting proprietary lock-ins, and transparency regarding critical dependencies. The aim is not to freeze work in its pre-AI state. It is to ensure that the removal of old frictions does not create new forms of dependency.

CONCLUSION

The challenge to the real value of work posed by AI should not be viewed solely as a threat. An economy needs to eliminate tasks that no longer create value. It needs to reduce transaction costs. It needs to enable competent individuals to compete with mediocre organisations. It needs to channel productivity towards those who truly know how to produce, make decisions, sell, innovate and take risks.

Work is not sacred by its very nature. What deserves protection is the human capacity to learn, judge, cooperate, create, pass on knowledge, take risks and build value. If a task is nothing but friction, we are right to eliminate it using AI. If an organisation survives only through opacity, we are right to put it at risk by using AI. If a professional confuses its procedures with its value, we are right to

²⁰ Morandini, S., Fraboni, F., De Angelis, M., Puzzo, G., Giusino, D., & Pietrantoni, L. (2023). The impact of artificial intelligence on workers' skills: Upskilling and reskilling in organisations. *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline*, 26, 39–68. <https://doi.org/10.28945/5078>

force it to justify itself by using AI. The true potential of using AI is not to eliminate work. It is to force work to prove its real value. It relies entirely on humans and their cognitive, adaptive and emotional characteristics.

But this disruption will only be positive if it genuinely opens up the market, strengthens competition, lowers barriers to entry and redistributes productive capacity. Otherwise, it will merely replace old rent-seeking arrangements with deeper dependencies on platforms, cloud services and model providers.

The right question, therefore, is not: how can we prevent the use of AI from transforming work? Rather, it is: how can we ensure that this transformation unleashes talent rather than protecting rent-seeking or reinforcing monopolies?

skema
THINK TANK

PUBLIKA

SKEMA Publika

SKEMA Business School, Grand Paris Campus
5 Quai Marcel Dassault – PO Box 90067
92156 Suresnes Cedex, France

Tel.: +33 1 71 13 39 32

Email: publika@skema.edu

Website: www.publika.skema.edu