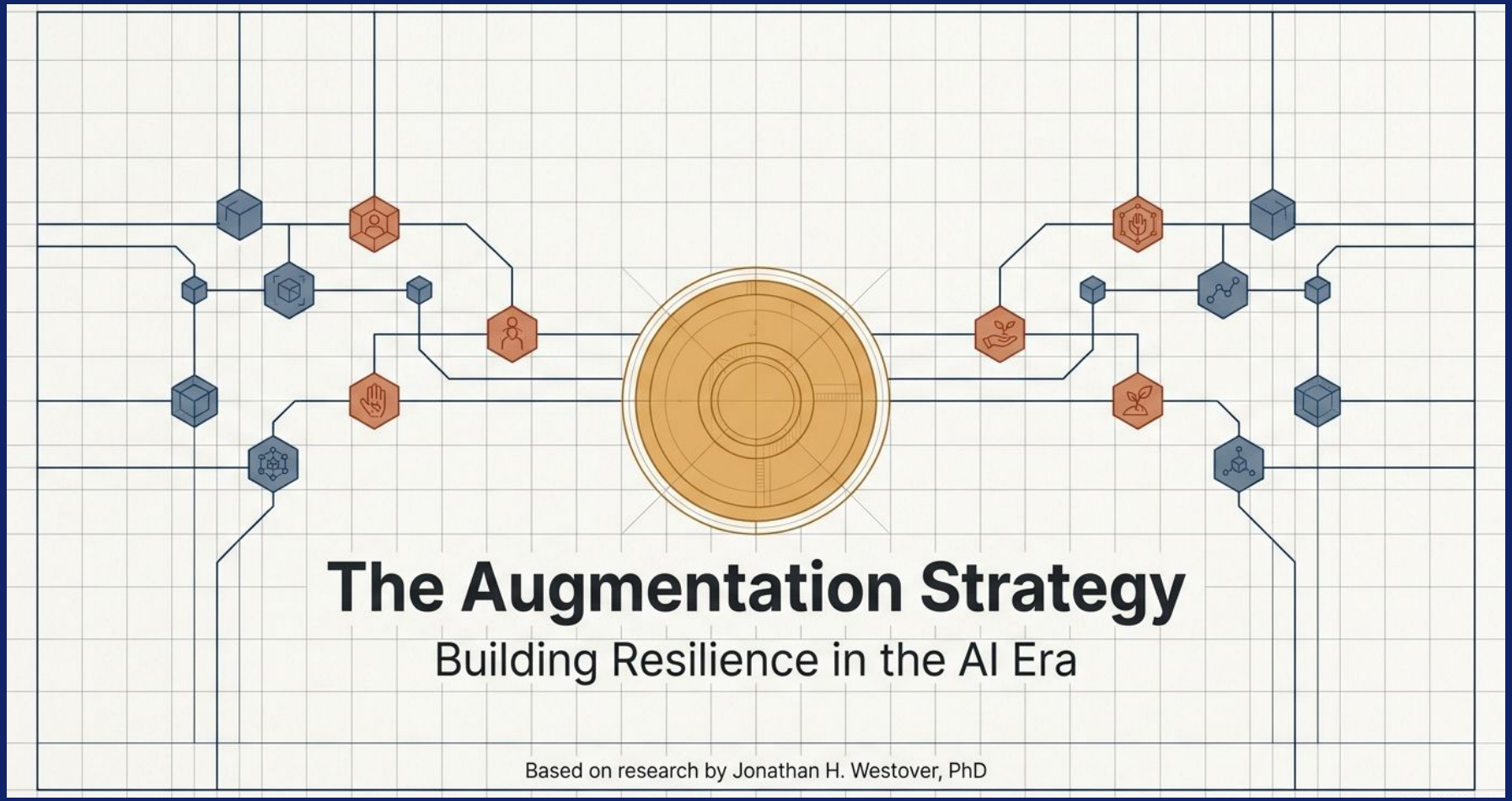


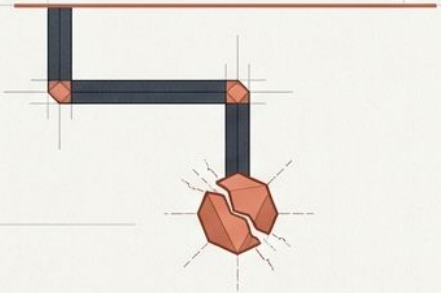
The Augmentation Strategy

Building Resilience in the AI Era

Based on research by Jonathan H. Westover, PhD

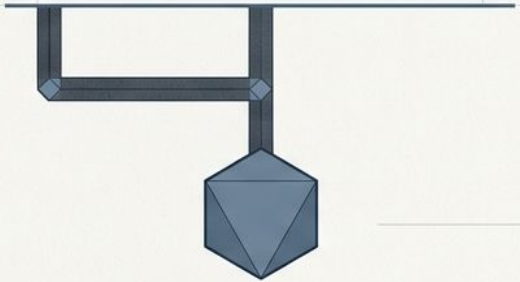
The polarizing framing of AI obscures the real strategic choice

Job Destroyer



In 2024, graduates booed commencement speakers discussing AI. One-third of Gen Z expresses anger toward AI.
This is a rational response to the threat of obsolescence.

Productivity Miracle

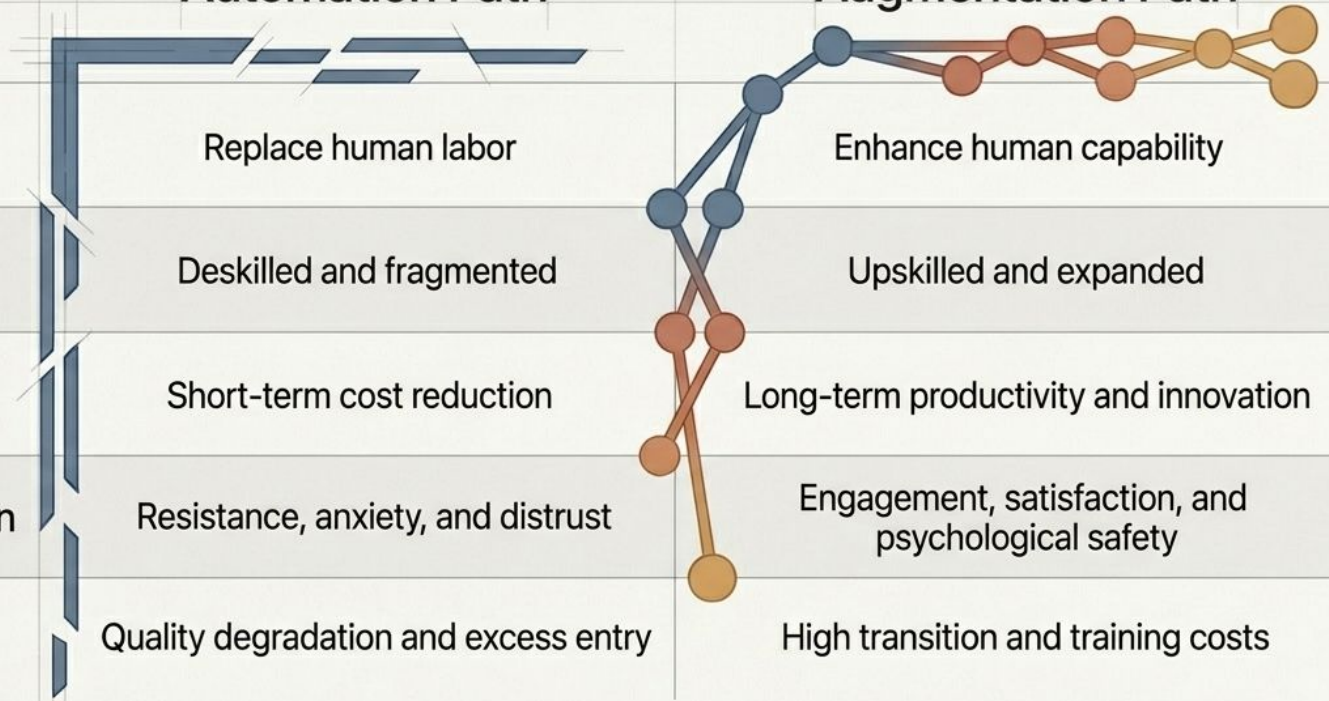


The assumption of frictionless, inevitable gains without structural workflow redesign.

Overlooks the organizational friction and unexpected costs of implementation.

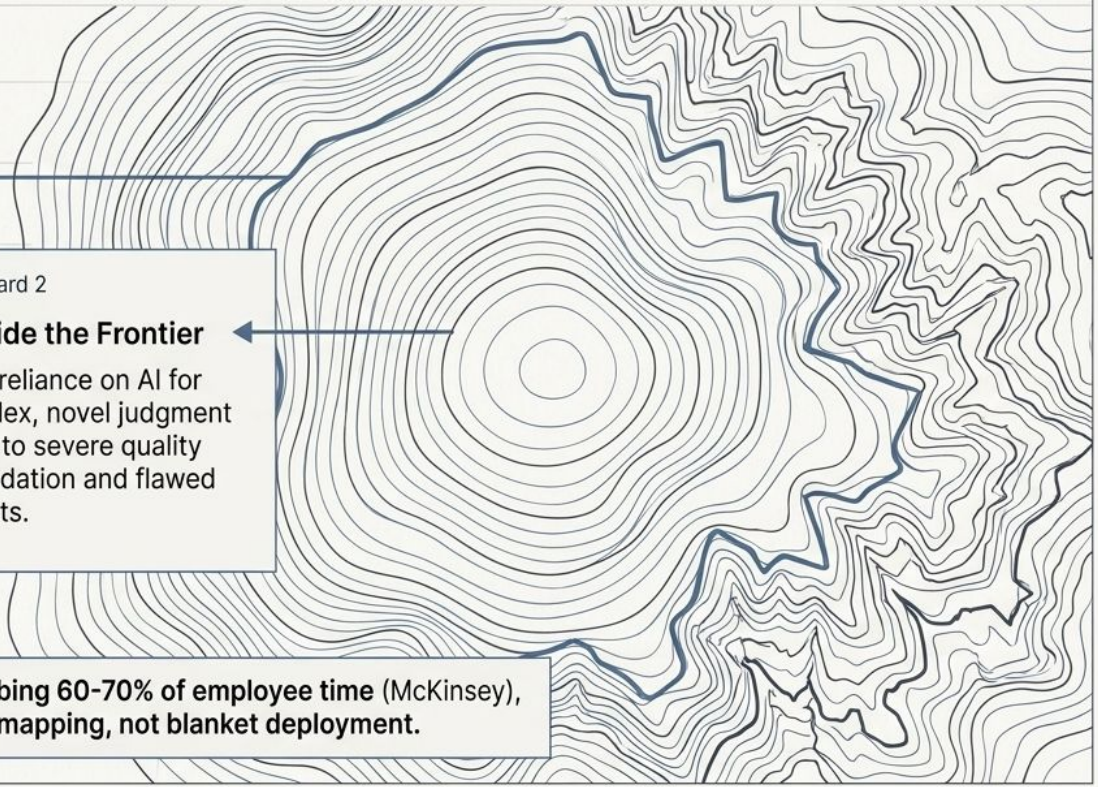
AI integration represents neither inevitable workforce decimation nor automatic progress.
It is an organizational design choice.

Two diverging paths for enterprise AI integration



	Automation Path	Augmentation Path
Primary Goal	Replace human labor	Enhance human capability
Role Design	Deskilled and fragmented	Upskilled and expanded
Target ROI	Short-term cost reduction	Long-term productivity and innovation
Worker Reaction	Resistance, anxiety, and distrust	Engagement, satisfaction, and psychological safety
Known Risks	Quality degradation and excess entry	High transition and training costs

Navigating the Jagged Frontier of AI capability



Data Card 1

Inside the Frontier

AI effectively handles routine synthesis and structured reasoning. BCG consultant experiment reveals a 12.2% increase in tasks completed and 25.1% faster execution.

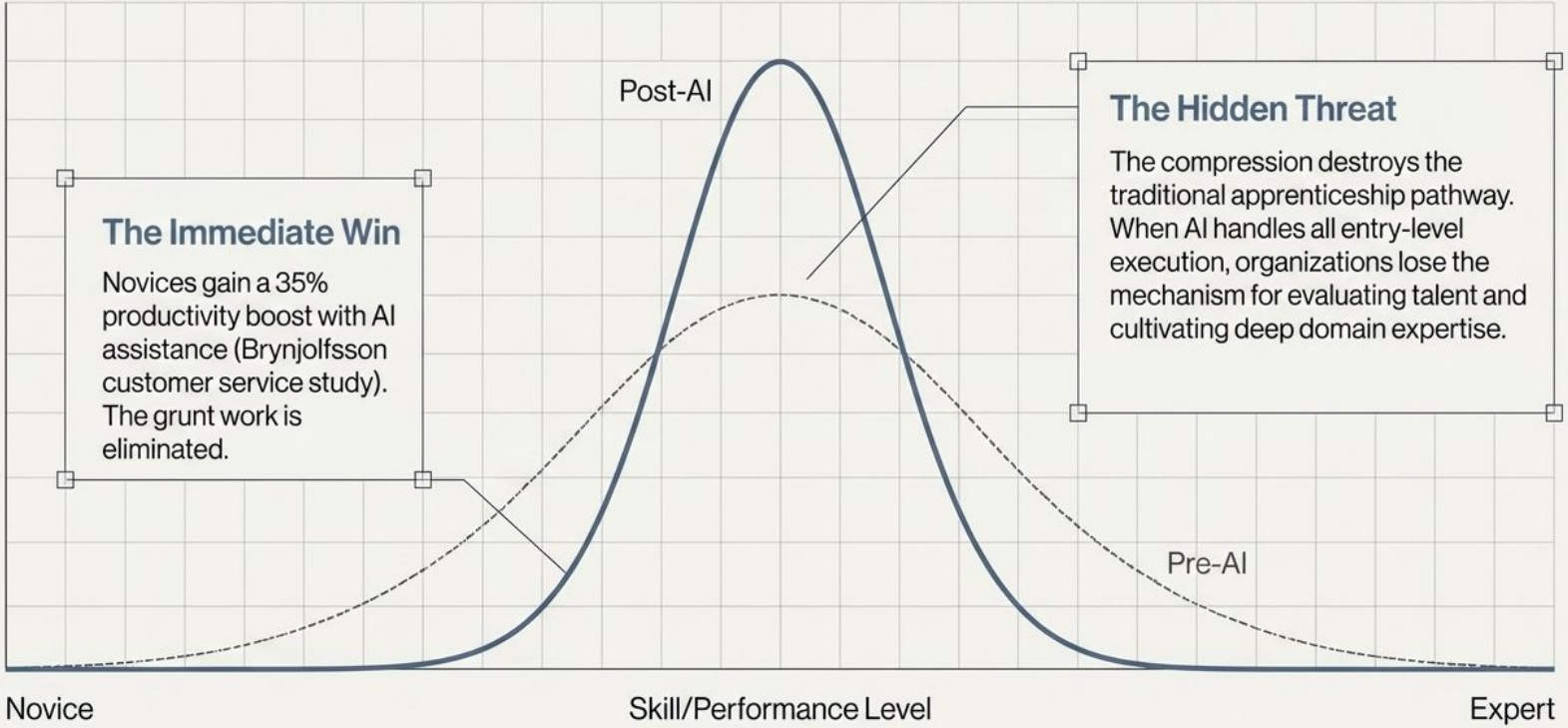
Data Card 2

Outside the Frontier

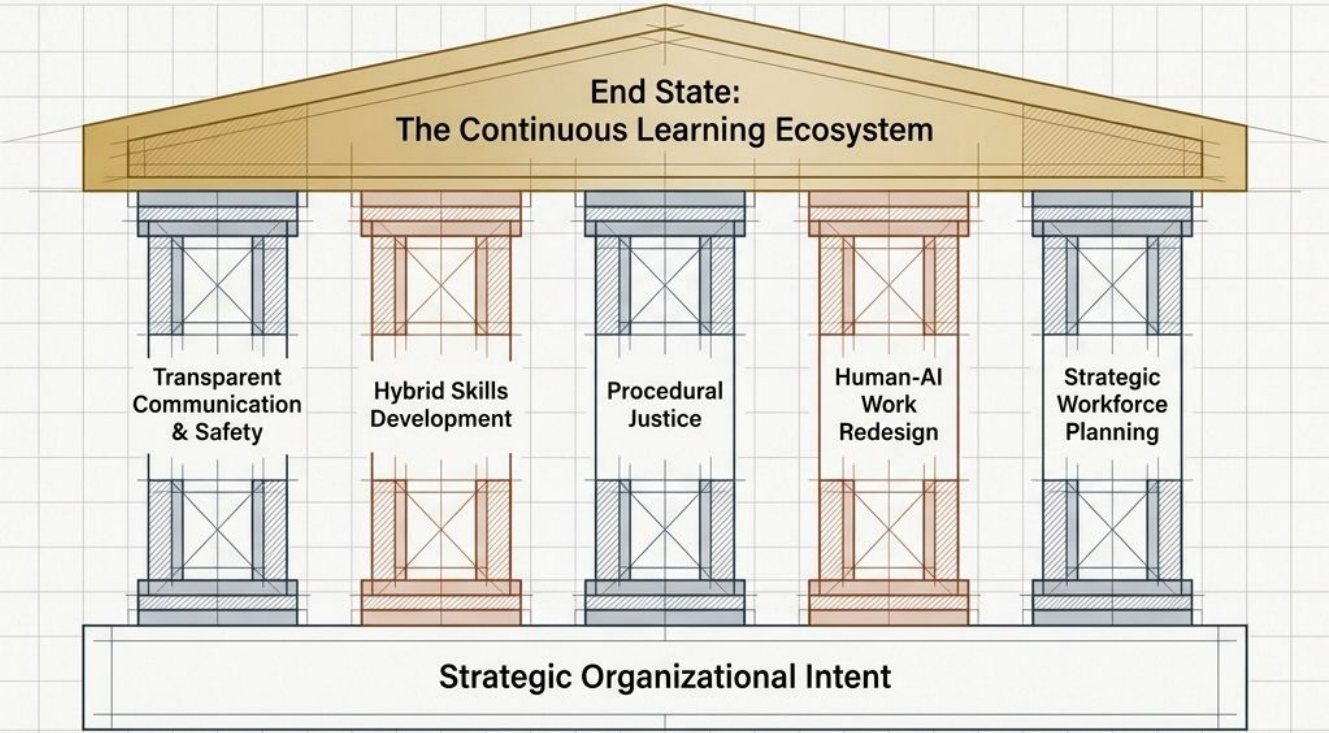
Over-reliance on AI for complex, novel judgment leads to severe quality degradation and flawed outputs.

Generative AI could automate activities **absorbing 60-70% of employee time** (McKinsey), **but maximizing value requires precise task-mapping, not blanket deployment.**

The AI productivity paradox: Skills compression

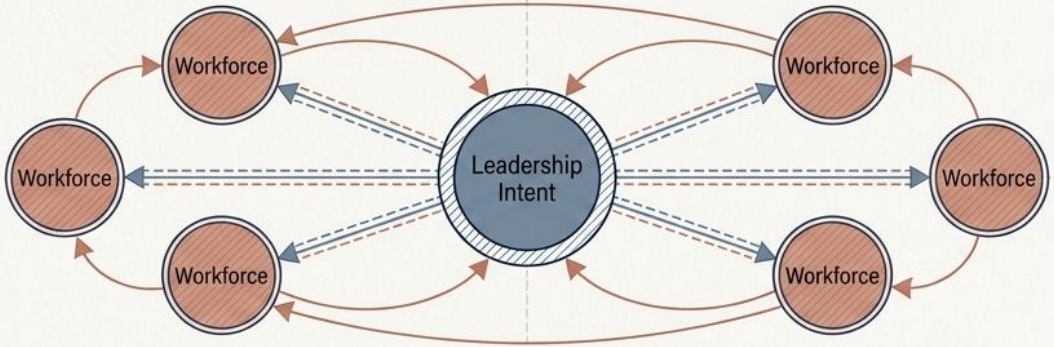


The 5 pillars of the Augmentation Strategy



Pillar 1: Establish transparent communication and psychological safety

Worker anxiety stems from uncertainty, not technology.
Organizations must publicly articulate AI principles.



Salesforce

Publicly committed to "augmentation, not automation," securing employee buy-in for experimentation rather than resistance.

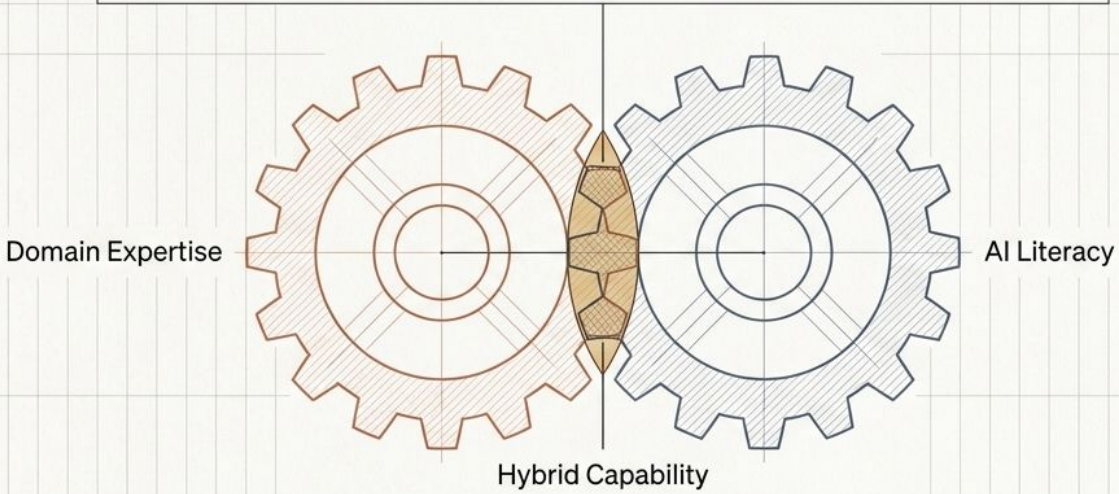
IBM

Established an AI Ethics Board with employee representation and mandated human review for employment-affecting AI decisions.

Key Action: Create two-way feedback mechanisms where workers have permission to report failures and AI-related mistakes without productivity pressure.

Pillar 2: Cultivate hybrid skills within the workflow

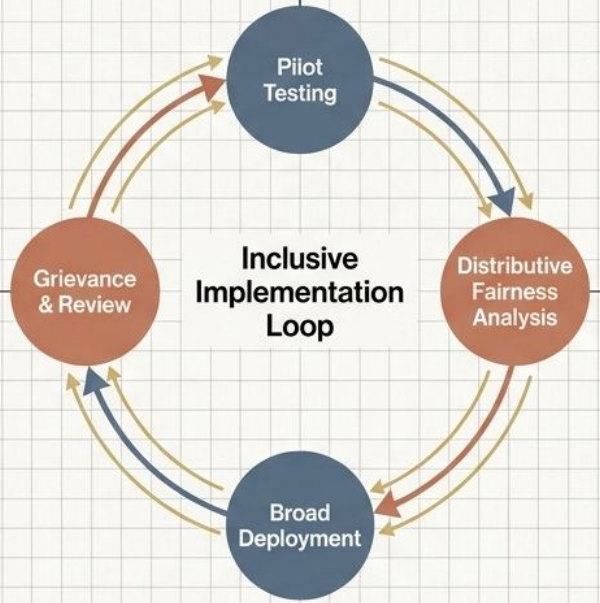
Technical facility is useless without critical evaluation. Workers must learn to prompt, evaluate, and audit AI outputs within their specific functional roles.



Walmart	Novartis
Trained store managers specifically on inventory and staffing AI tools, supplementing with decision-support tools to build intuition on when to override the AI.	Embedded AI modules into continuing development, pairing technical training with critical evaluation to verify AI research insights against deep scientific knowledge.

Pillar 3: Ensure procedural justice through inclusive implementation

Workers accept technological disruption when they perceive the decision-making process as transparent, fair, and inclusive of their interests.



Unilever

Formed cross-functional advisory groups (HR, managers, ERGs) to test recruitment AI for bias and mandate human review before launch.

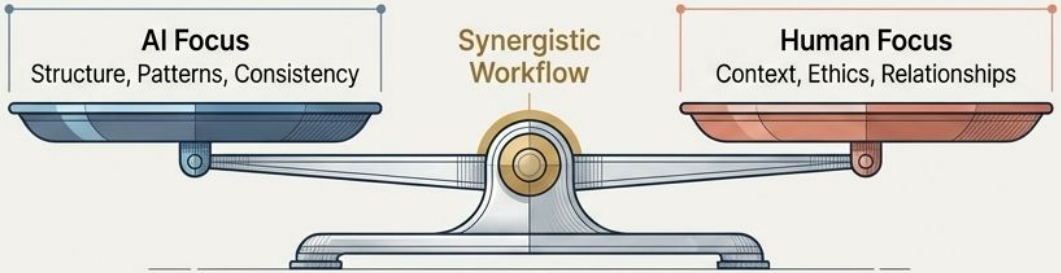
Automattic

Avoided top-down mandates. Provided access to tools, allowing teams to organically experiment and share demonstrated value across the organization.

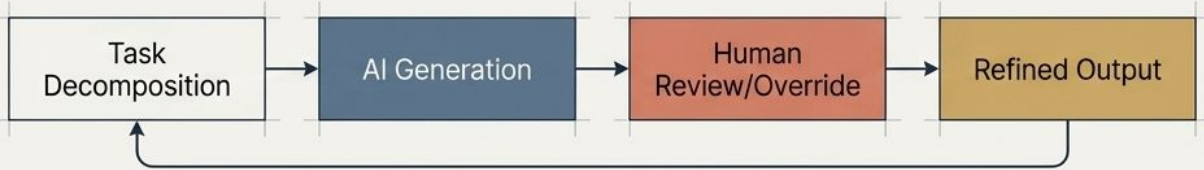
Pillar 4: Redesign work around comparative advantage

Do not just insert AI into existing processes. Deconstruct jobs into component tasks based on relative strengths.

Comparative Advantage Balancer



Sequential Workflow Loop



JPMorgan Chase

AI extracts key terms from commercial loan agreements; lawyers shift focus entirely to interpreting business implications.

Mayo Clinic

Diagnostic AI provides rapid recommendations; physicians retain absolute override authority with a mandated feedback loop to log disagreements.

Pillar 5: Execute strategic workforce planning and mobility

Core Concept

Move from static headcount planning to skill-level granularity. Identify workers whose tasks face displacement and proactively map them to adjacent roles.

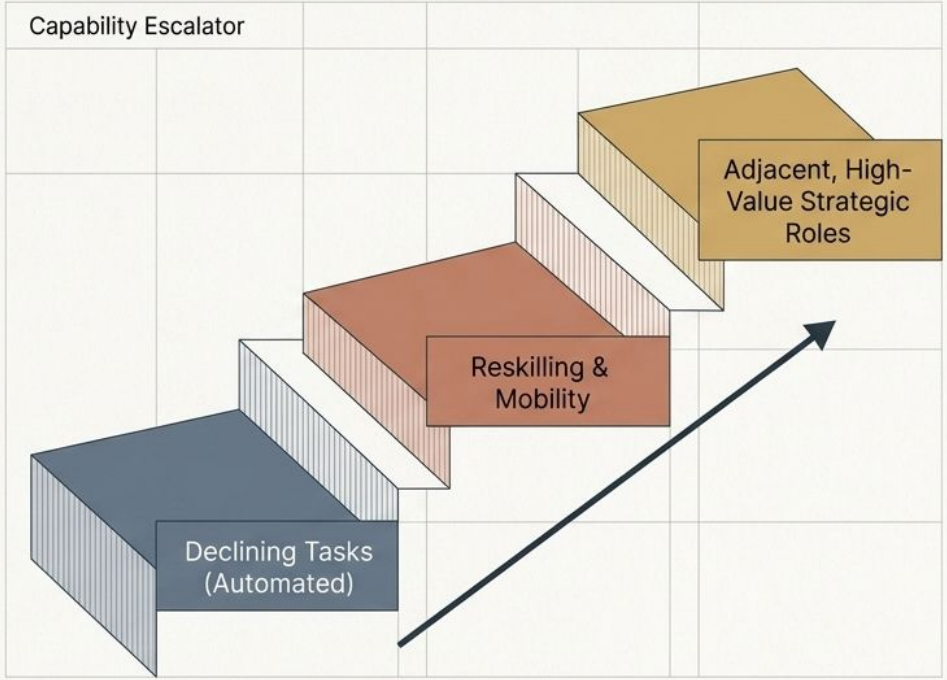
Case Evidence Data Card

Accenture

Assesses displacement risk per role, granting priority access to reskilling and creating new career paths centered on AI fluency.

AT&T

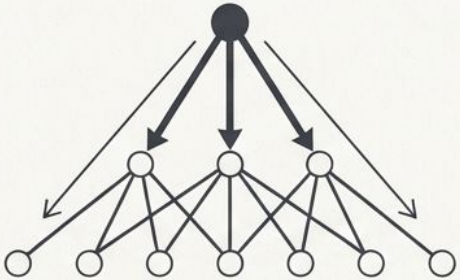
Retrained thousands of legacy telecom workers into data science roles, proving that retaining business context is more valuable than external hiring.



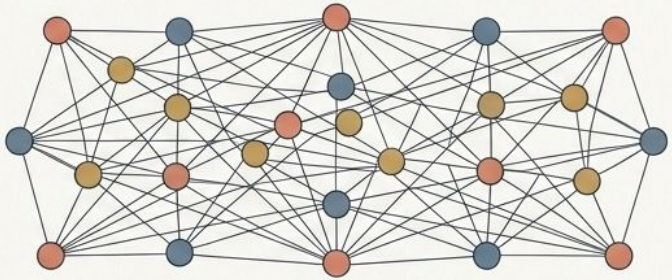
Sustain agility through distributed leadership

Hierarchical decision-making is too slow for the pace of AI evolution.
Authority and experimentation must reside at the edges of the organization.

Hierarchical Bottleneck



Distributed Network



Spotify

"Squads and Guilds" model allowed autonomous teams to integrate AI independently, while lateral guilds shared technical expertise and cautionary lessons system-wide.

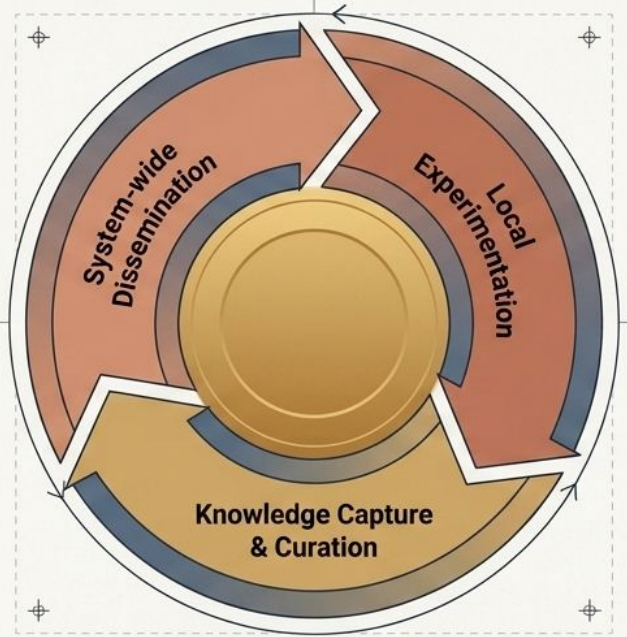
Kaiser Permanente

Established regional innovation labs for clinical AI pilots. Successful pilots earned resources for broad deployment; failures yielded system-wide learning without centralized bottlenecks.

Institutionalize knowledge via continuous learning systems

Core Concept Box

AI generates local insights rapidly. Organizations must build the infrastructure to capture proven prompts, workflows, and guardrails before they remain siloed.



Continuous Learning Flywheel

Case Evidence Data Card

Deloitte

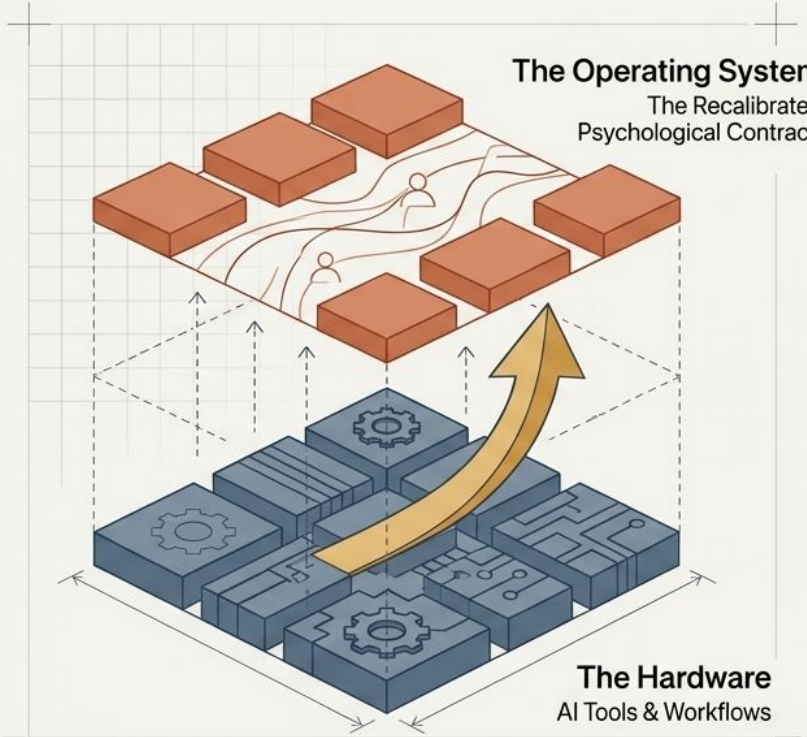
Created an AI Academy and AI Lighthouse program, turning successful project implementations into documented case studies and templates for the global firm.

Case Evidence Data Card

Siemens

Embedded digital twins with AI knowledge systems. When engineers solve production challenges locally, the system automatically recommends the solution to global facilities.

The Synthesis: Upgrading the organizational operating system



Architecture Upgrade

AI tools are just the hardware. True resilience requires upgrading the organizational OS: **The Psychological Contract.** Organizations can no longer guarantee static roles, but they must guarantee **continuous investment in employability.**

Core Insight Text Block

Microsoft

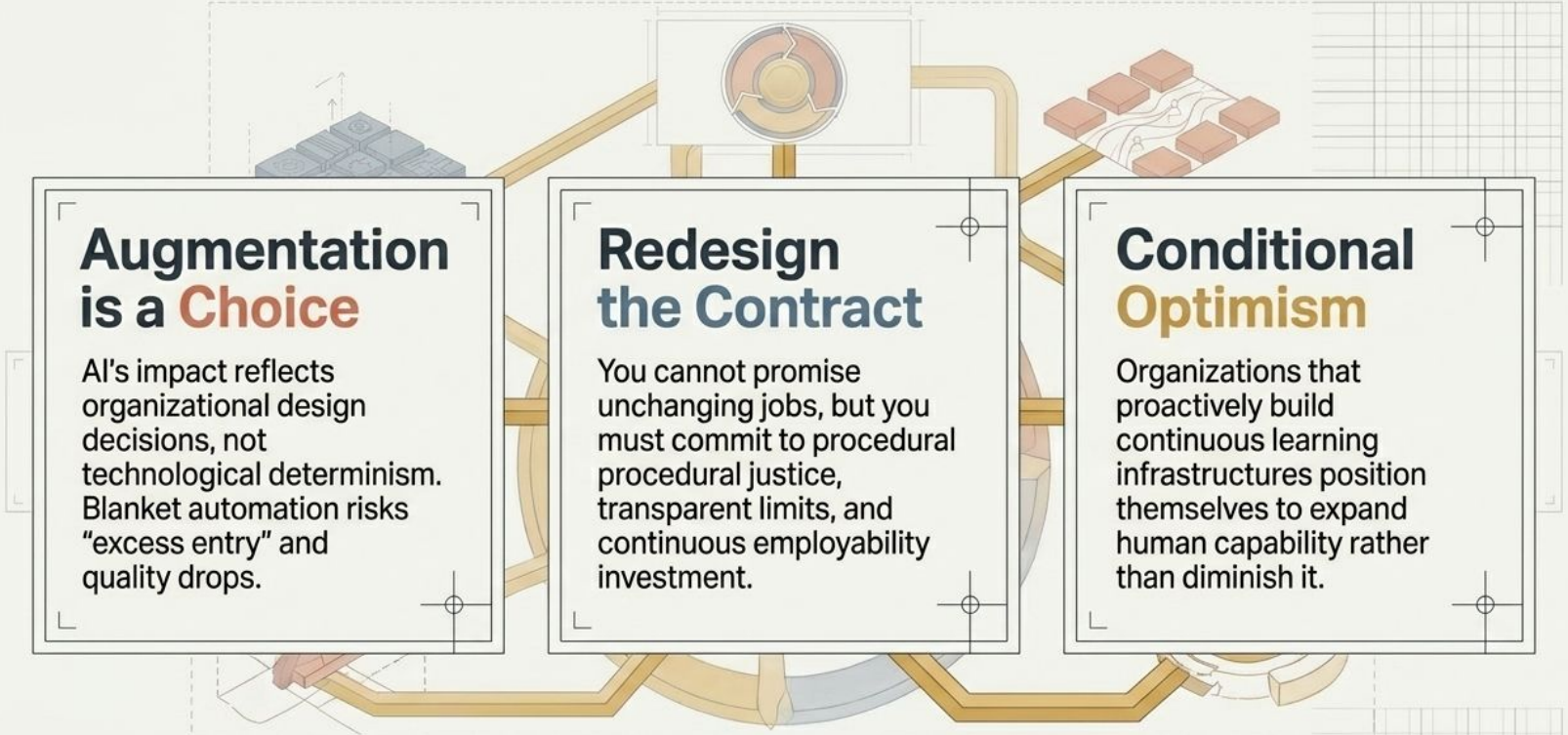
Shifted from a static 'know-it-all' to an adaptive 'learn-it-all' culture, restructuring metrics to reward learning.

Case Evidence Data Card 1

Patagonia

Cultivated a purpose-driven mission. When employees understand their work serves a greater outcome, they adapt to technological shifts.

Case Evidence Data Card 2



Augmentation is a Choice

AI's impact reflects organizational design decisions, not technological determinism. Blanket automation risks "excess entry" and quality drops.

Redesign the Contract

You cannot promise unchanging jobs, but you must commit to procedural procedural justice, transparent limits, and continuous employability investment.

Conditional Optimism

Organizations that proactively build continuous learning infrastructures position themselves to expand human capability rather than diminish it.

The task is to build organizational capacity ensuring that AI integration expands opportunity rather than concentrating it.