



Reimagining Work in the Age of AI

From Roles to Skills

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Introduction

AI is giving leaders a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine work, roles, skills, and human potential. Rather than asking how AI can make existing jobs more efficient, leaders should ask a different question: **Knowing what AI can do and the unique value of human workers, how do we want to organize jobs differently to improve business outcomes?**

The urgency is growing. According to the World Economic Forum, employers expect **39% of workers' core skills to change by 2030**, while **63% identify skills gaps as a major barrier to business transformation**. AI and information-processing technologies rank among the most powerful drivers of workforce change over the next five years.

Employees recognize this urgency as well. [BDO's Winning on the People Side of Business research](#) found that **93% of employees and 94% of business leaders identify skills development and training** as important to helping their organizations thrive now and in the future, making it one of the most highly ranked people priorities in our study.

This is not simply an HR initiative. It is a leadership imperative to redesign work in ways that unlock both business value and human ingenuity.



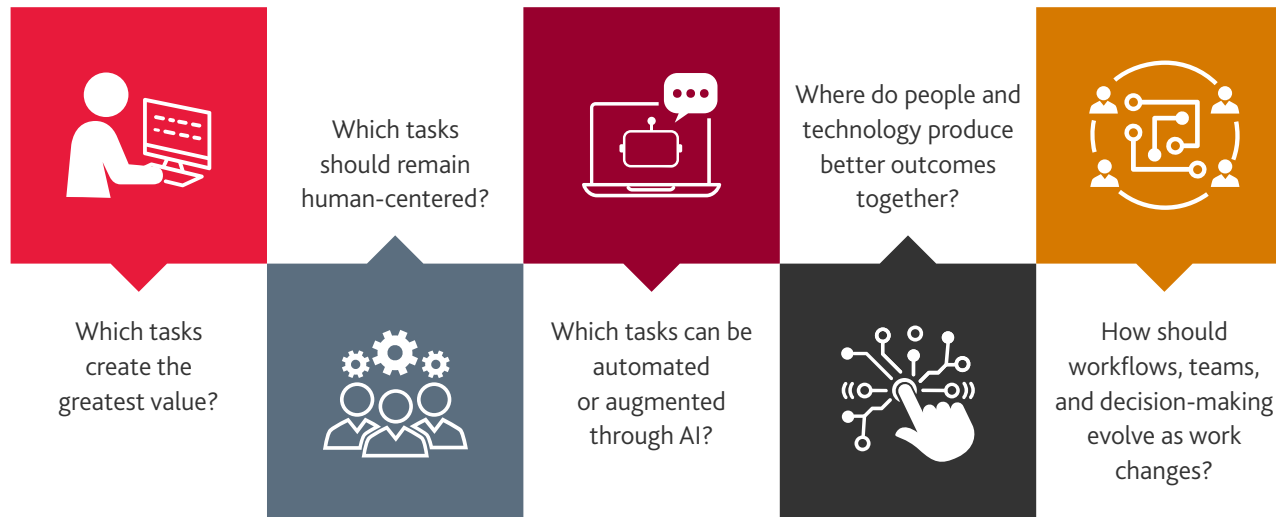
Rethinking How Work Gets Done

For decades, organizations have used defined jobs as the way to structure work. They hired employees into specific roles, assigned responsibilities, and their work evolved gradually over time.

AI is disrupting that model.

Many tasks that once required significant human effort can now be automated or augmented. At the same time, uniquely human capabilities such as judgment, creativity, empathy, relationship building, ethical decision-making, and complex problem-solving are becoming even more valuable.

This means leaders need to be asking very different questions:



The organizations creating the greatest value are not simply deploying new tools. They are intentionally redesigning work by bringing together technology, talent, and business strategy to create better outcomes that neither people nor AI could achieve independently.

Equally important, this work should not happen *to employees*. It should happen with them. Employees understand the realities of their work better than anyone else. They know which activities create value, which consume unnecessary time, which boost engagement, where bottlenecks exist, and where AI can improve efficiency without sacrificing quality, innovation, or relationships. By involving employees in reimagining work, leaders gain better solutions while building trust, reducing uncertainty, and creating greater ownership of change.

Why Traditional Job Architecture Can't Keep Pace

As organizations reimagine work, they quickly discover that traditional job architecture no longer provides enough flexibility.

Mercer found that [fewer than half of organizations](#) believe their current job architecture effectively supports business needs. Traditional structures often struggle to adapt to changing priorities, provide limited visibility into career opportunities, and make it difficult to understand workforce capabilities beyond job titles.

Instead, work is increasingly defined by the combination of capabilities required to achieve an outcome rather than by a fixed position on an organizational chart. In other words, work is becoming more dynamic while many talent systems remain static.

As the pace of change accelerates, organizations need greater visibility into the skills and capabilities that exist across the workforce than traditional job titles alone can provide.

Business leaders recognize the implications. According to the World Economic Forum, 59% of CEOs consider the availability of critical skills a significant business risk, while nearly one-quarter believes their current organizational structure is limiting performance.

That shift naturally moves organizations from managing jobs to managing capabilities. Once work has been reimaged, leaders can identify the skills required to perform it, understand where those capabilities already exist, and invest intentionally in developing the workforce they will need for the future.



Building a Skills-Based Organization

Once organizations reimagine work, they can answer a more strategic question: **What capabilities do our people need to create value now and in the future?**

This represents a significant shift in workforce planning. Instead of asking, *"Who can fill this position?"* leaders begin asking, *"What skills and capabilities are needed to achieve this outcome?"*

That shift creates meaningful advantages across the organization.

First, it improves agility. When leaders understand the capabilities available across the workforce, they can redeploy talent more quickly as business priorities change.

Second, it strengthens workforce planning. Rather than relying on job titles alone, organizations gain better insight into where to invest in development, where to hire, where to automate, and where existing talent can be reskilled or redeployed.

Third, it expands internal mobility. Employees gain greater visibility into adjacent career opportunities and the capabilities needed to pursue them, making career growth more flexible and responsive to changing business needs. It also creates greater visibility into hidden capabilities that often go unused in traditional role-based talent systems.

Finally, it helps organizations realize greater value from AI. Gartner notes that organizations seeing the strongest returns from AI focus not only on technology adoption but also on redesigning work and business processes to support it.



Unlocking Hidden Talent

One of the greatest benefits of a skills-based strategy is that it reveals capabilities organizations often do not realize they already possess.

Traditional talent systems typically define employees by the jobs they hold rather than the full range of capabilities they possess. Yet employees frequently develop valuable skills through previous roles, education, volunteer experiences, certifications, stretch assignments, and personal interests that are never reflected in formal job descriptions.

These untapped capabilities are becoming increasingly important as organizations respond to rapid technological change, evolving customer needs, and ongoing talent shortages. Too often, organizations hire for capabilities they already have. They simply cannot see them in their existing talent pool.

Understanding the capabilities within their workforce allows leaders to make better decisions about staffing projects, developing employees, building leadership pipelines, and preparing for future business needs. Equally important, it creates opportunities for employees to apply skills that might otherwise remain untapped.



What's Holding Organizations Back

While many leaders recognize the need to reimagine work, translating that ambition into meaningful organizational change remains difficult.

One challenge is data. Many organizations lack a common language for defining skills or a consistent way to assess workforce capabilities across the enterprise.

Another is governance. Mercer found that organizations with effective job architecture [are significantly more likely](#) to have governance processes that keep jobs, skills, and business priorities aligned as work evolves.

Perhaps the greatest challenge, however, is being able to move beyond optimization to redesign.

Many organizations are still asking how AI can improve existing jobs instead of asking whether those jobs should be redesigned in the first place.

Reimagining work requires leaders to challenge long-held assumptions about roles, reporting structures, career paths, and how value is created. That kind of transformation cannot happen without employees.

As AI becomes more integrated into everyday work, employees naturally ask:



How will my work change?



Which tasks will AI perform?



Which skills will become more important?



What opportunities will exist for me in the future?



How will I continue to learn and grow?

These concerns are particularly relevant for workers in roles experiencing significant AI-driven change. Research shows that [women are overrepresented](#) in some of the occupations most exposed to AI disruption, including clerical, administrative, and data-entry roles. At the same time, [many younger workers](#) are employed in occupations with medium to high AI exposure. For these employees, uncertainty about the future of work can feel especially personal.

Without proactively acknowledging or addressing these questions, leaders risk creating uncertainty and resistance at the very moment they need employees to embrace change.

Organizations that create environments characterized by [Deep Trust and High Expectations®](#) are far better positioned to navigate this transformation. Trust gives employees the confidence to experiment, learn, and adapt. High expectations reinforce accountability, continuous learning, and shared ownership of results.

When employees are invited to help reimagine work rather than simply respond to change, they become active participants in shaping the future instead of passive recipients of it.

What Leaders Must Do to Reimagine Work

Reimagining work helps leaders make one of the most important workforce decisions they now face: whether capabilities should be built, bought, borrowed, or automated.

Historically, organizations addressed capability gaps primarily through hiring. Today, leaders have more options. The right decision depends on a clear understanding of the work to be done, the capabilities required, improving human talents, and where people and technology create the most value together. That is why continuous learning must be the most important part of the organization's operating model. As AI evolves, so will the skills needed to create value. Leaders must create the conditions for employees to build new capabilities, apply them in meaningful ways, and grow as work changes.

The organizations that succeed will not wait for certainty. They will build while learning, lead while learning, and intentionally shape the future rather than react to it. In the age of AI, competitive advantage will come from leaders who continuously align work, skills, and technology to unlock both business value and human potential.

Are your talent strategies keeping pace with how work is changing? Discover how BDO can help your organization redesign work, strengthen skills, and accelerate workforce transformation in the age of AI.

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