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State of AI and Society

AI's Impacts on the Quality of Work

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Contents

1. Introduction

In this report, we ask how the integration of AI into work processes may impact upon the quality of work. We examine this question from the perspective of workers, and propose a framework that explores two key aspects of how AI affects quality of work. First, does AI affect the **conditions** under which work takes place and whether work can be described as decent? We discuss how AI might impact upon the benefits that workers receive, their stability, security, privacy and safety at work, whether they are treated fairly, and the degree to which their voices are recognised and heard. Second, does AI affect the **nature** of work and whether work can be described as meaningful? AI could affect the extent to which work provides workers with enjoyment, skills development, social recognition, a sense of achievement or having made a contribution, and a feeling of community.

Quality of work matters for many reasons. The workplace is where most people spend a large proportion of their time. It is a central place where people are subject to the power of others and where their rights might be threatened. Work has a significant impact upon workers' wellbeing. Good work can give people a deep sense of meaning, belonging and recognition. Bad work can leave them exhausted, precarious and unsafe. Work quality has been shown to have as large an effect on individuals' wellbeing as physical health (Green, 2026).

Given the importance of quality of work, assessing AI's impact on quality of work is crucial, because the path is not fixed. Workers, companies and governments can make choices to shape worker-centred AI development and adoption and to design worker-centred public policy interventions.

The report is organised into five sections. In this first, introductory section we outline the aims, justification and structure. In the second, we conceptualise AI and quality of work, and lay out our framework for assessing AI's effects on "good work" across 15 dimensions that cover both the conditions and nature of work. We also explain how our framework develops or diverges from other approaches in existing research. In the third section, we present evidence on how AI impacts upon the seven dimensions across which we assess the conditions of work: benefits; fair procedures; health and safety; privacy; stability and security; worker voice; and working time and work intensity. We do the same for the eight dimensions we use to assess AI's impacts on the nature of work: autonomy; contribution; enjoyment; relationships; skill development; sense of achievement; social recognition; and value alignment. In the fourth section, we focus on the different ways in which AI affects work quality according to context, covering factors such as sociodemographic characteristics and geographical location. Finally, we draw out some key findings from the evidence presented.

In this report, "quality of work" (used interchangeably with "work quality") refers to the conditions under which work takes place, the nature of work and how the person performing it experiences them. It does not refer to the quality of a worker's output. We prefer this term to "job quality", which is common in the literature, because much of the world's work is informal and does not take the form of a job. In informal work settings, there is often no contract and no employment relationship.

There is a great deal that we do not know about the impact of AI on the quality of work. Existing research tends to concentrate on the experience of workers in firms operating in developed economies, so the gap to fill is widest for developing countries and the informal economy. It may seem too early to determine the effects of such a fast-moving technology on the quality of work. The conditions and nature of work change more slowly, and are hard to assess. But we need to start building an evidence base before it is too late.

2. Conceptualising the impacts of AI on quality of work

Before we assess how AI impacts the quality of work, we must first establish what good work is. The existing literature agrees that quality of work is multidimensional, but it offers different perspectives about what those dimensions are and how they should be defined. It also offers no framework designed to answer the question of how AI impacts on quality of work.

In this section, we develop our own framework, drawing on both the general quality of work literature and an emerging literature that focuses on the empirical evidence for AI's effects. In the first part, we describe the process through which we arrive at our framework. In the second, we outline the 15 dimensions of work quality that make up the framework. In the final part, we describe the ways in which our framework differs from other approaches.

2.1 How we develop our framework

We develop our own framework of work quality dimensions to enable a systematic stocktake of the ways in which AI may affect quality of work. We draw on two existing bodies of literature.

First, there is a body of literature that conceptualises the quality of work. It approaches questions of work quality in general terms, without focusing on the specific question of how it may be impacted by AI. This body of literature proposes a wide range of frameworks that emphasise different and at times divergent conceptual perspectives.

For this report, we draw primarily from frameworks proposed within organisational psychology (e.g. Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Karasek, 1979; Jahoda, 1982; Warr, 1987; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), philosophy (e.g. Gheaus and Herzog, 2016; Veltman, 2016; Clark, 2017) and public policy (e.g. International Labour Organization, 1999; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014; UN Economic Commission for Europe, 2015).

Second, there is a more recent body of literature that focuses on the emerging empirical evidence for AI's impacts on the quality of work. It examines the question of AI's impacts in a specific context rather than proposing a comprehensive framework of work quality dimensions that may be impacted by AI. For this report, we draw primarily from research examining AI's impacts on work quality in the fields of policy (e.g. Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023; International Labour Organization, 2026); management (e.g. Kellogg, Valentine and Christin, 2020; Choudhury, 2025); sociology (e.g. Pugh, 2024; Krzywdzinski, 2026); philosophy (e.g. Vredenburgh, 2022; Santoni de Sio, 2024); information systems (e.g. Vaccaro, Almaatouq and Malone, 2024; Tankelevitch et al., 2025); industrial relations and labour advocacy (e.g. International Trade Union Confederation, 2025; European Training Foundation, 2026); economics (e.g. Fukui, Nakamura and Steinsson, 2026; Manning and Aguirre, 2026); AI governance (e.g. Solove, 2025; Bommasani et al., 2026); occupational health (e.g. Fiegler-Rudol et al., 2025; Jetha et al., 2025); and journalism (e.g. Islam, 2026; O'Connor, 2026).

As noted above, the existing literature agrees that quality of work is multidimensional. However, it offers different perspectives on what these dimensions are and how each of them is defined. To establish a set of dimensions suitable for our analysis of AI's impact, we first develop an initial longlist of dimensions with a substantive basis in the literature branch concerned with conceptualising the quality of work. We then review these against the literature branch examining AI's emerging impacts on work quality. This review enables us to narrow the list of dimensions under consideration to those relevant for assessing the impacts of AI on work quality. For example, we exclude a set of work quality dimensions that focus on the psychosocial characteristics and dispositional traits of workers (e.g.

self-evaluation and psychological resilience) (Judge, Heller and Mount, 2002). These are strong determinants of job satisfaction and subjective wellbeing at work, and will shape subjective experiences of AI; however, they are not directly relevant for describing the transformational impacts of AI on work.

We consolidate the resulting list through two further steps to identify a set of work quality dimensions at an appropriate level of abstraction for assessing the impacts of AI. First, we group similar dimensions under a unifying heading. For example, we group dimensions such as "learning" and "expertise" under "Skill development and excellence". Second, we remove dimensions that are best described as combinations of more basic dimensions. For example, "creativity" involves the exercise of autonomy and skill, experiencing enjoyment and a sense of achievement, and making a contribution. Removing dimensions like creativity reduces duplicative analysis.

The process outlined above results in a set of 15 dimensions designed to capture the ways in which AI can affect the quality of jobs. The final step we take to arrive at our framework is to group these into two categories: dimensions relating to conditions of work and dimensions relating to the nature of work.

2.2 Our framework's 15 dimensions of quality of work

Our framework consists of the 15 dimensions we identified. In this section, we describe each dimension in turn. We order the dimensions alphabetically under the two categories proposed in the previous section: conditions of work and nature of work.

Conditions of work

1. **Benefits.** Whether the work comes with formal benefits such as a workplace pension, paid holidays and paid parental leave, as well as day-to-day benefits such as flexible working options. Please note that we do not include wages in this category.
2. **Fair procedures.** Whether hiring, evaluation and dismissal decisions follow procedures that are reasonable, unbiased, transparent, contestable and in line with employment law.
3. **Health and safety.** The extent to which workers are protected from physical and mental injury.
4. **Privacy.** Whether the work and the workplace respects workers' right to privacy.
5. **Stability and security.** The extent to which the work is predictable and a worker's role is secure over time.
6. **Worker voice.** The degree to which workers have a say over working conditions and processes (via unions, participation in decision-making, or ownership).
7. **Working time and intensity.** The length of hours worked and the pace, strenuousness and demandingness of the work.

Nature of work

1. **Autonomy.** The extent to which workers have discretion over how they execute their tasks and whether their work affords opportunities for exercising freedom and responsibility.
2. **Contribution.** The extent to which the work is useful to society.
3. **Enjoyment.** The extent to which work is experienced as pleasurable and engaging.
4. **Relationships.** Whether workers have good relationships with co-workers, managers and clients or customers, and whether the workplace enables workers to experience a sense of community.

5. **Sense of achievement.** Whether workers experience a sense of achievement in performing or completing their work tasks.
6. **Skill development and excellence.** The extent to which work enables workers to develop and exercise skills and capabilities, rather than allowing them to atrophy.
7. **Social recognition.** The extent to which workers' contributions are recognised and esteemed by others.
8. **Value alignment.** The extent to which the work is aligned with workers' values and life plans, from their own perspective.

2.3 How our framework compares to other approaches

Three characteristics distinguish the framework that we propose from the approaches taken by other researchers.

First, it contrasts with several prominent existing frameworks in that it covers quality of work dimensions that relate both to conditions of work and to the nature of work. Alternative frameworks tend to focus on one category or the other.

Second, it allows for conceptualising impacts on work quality both in terms of failures to meet a minimum threshold on a given dimension and in terms of impacts that lie above any such threshold.

Third, it conceives of and distinguishes between individual dimensions based on their salience in light of AI-related impacts. As we noted in Section 2.1, our framework excludes dimensions that are irrelevant to the question of AI-specific impacts. It also differentiates between aspects of work quality that did not necessarily require differential treatment in a world without AI.

We illustrate the three characteristics outlined above by comparing our framework to two prominent approaches from the existing general literature on quality of work (Blustein, Lysova and Duffy, 2023).

There is a substantial body of literature that covers "decent work" (Christie et al., 2021). This literature focuses on the conditions of work, without assigning the same prominent role to dimensions that our framework considers under the category of "nature of work". It also conceptualises the assessment of impacts in terms of whether the conditions of work meet certain minimum thresholds. Finally, this literature focuses on dimensions that fall outside the range of AI-specific impacts on work quality, such as the elimination of forced and child labour. For example, the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) Decent Work Agenda, the main point of reference within this body of work, covers dimensions of work whose absence constitutes a clear harm to basic human interests, including access to jobs, minimum safety standards, social protections and rights in the workplace (International Labour Organization, 1999).

Another substantial body of literature covers "meaningful work". This literature focuses on dimensions that our framework groups under the category of the nature of work rather than the conditions of work. It tends to focus on impacts that go beyond minimum thresholds or basic human interests. This research also tends to group together aspects of work quality that benefit from differentiation in the context of AI's impacts. For example, Gheaus and Herzog (2016) set out four non-monetary goods of work: attaining excellence, making a social contribution, experiencing community and gaining social recognition. In contrast, our framework does not rely on a single dimension of attaining excellence, but distinguishes between "Skill development and excellence", "Autonomy" and "Sense of achievement" as separate dimensions that can better capture AI-related impacts.

Our framework thereby incorporates the analytical scope of both decent work and meaningful work approaches, in so far as each is relevant to assessing AI's impacts on quality of work. This allows us to capture trade-offs and interactions between the conditions of work and the nature of work that either approach alone would miss.

In the context of AI, these trade-offs and interactions are particularly important. The AI-driven transformation of basic working conditions will reshape opportunities for meaningful work. For example, automating tasks in order to improve worker safety may come at the cost of removing those that a worker finds meaningful. In this case, what registers as an improvement in basic working conditions may decrease the value that a worker derives from performing a dangerous but meaningful task. An approach that focuses solely on the conditions of work misses this trade-off and registers an unambiguous gain instead.

As AI reshapes the nature of work more widely, significant questions will arise regarding whether workers ought to have basic entitlements to meaningful jobs and the kinds of tasks that need to be preserved for human workers, recognising the unique contribution of the workplace to providing purpose and significance in many people's lives. For example, generative AI has the potential to automate swathes of tasks that provide meaning to workers, such as writing, strategic thinking and creative problem-solving. If qualities previously afforded by these roles – such as exercising skills, gaining a sense of achievement and making a contribution in the workplace – become scarcely accessible in jobs where they were once taken for granted, it will be necessary to consider these losses from the perspective of decent work and the need for minimum thresholds and basic entitlements.

In this section, we proposed a framework for understanding how AI impacts quality of work. We described the process through which we developed the framework and outlined the characteristics that distinguish it from other approaches. Armed with this understanding, we are ready to turn our attention to the numerous and varied ways in which AI impacts work quality.

3. AI's impacts on quality of work

In this section, we assess the impacts of AI along each dimension of work quality in our framework. We find that AI's impact is highly dependent on the type of work, the individual worker and the broader organisational and socioeconomic factors shaping the adoption of AI.

In the subsections that follow, we focus on the themes that emerge most prominently in the literature. We cover individual themes within the dimensions where they are most consequential. For example, we look at algorithmic management in most detail within the fair practices dimension, as that is where its effects are most deeply felt. However, we also highlight where these practices have a bearing on other dimensions, such as "Autonomy", "Privacy", "Stability and security" and "Worker voice".

Before we proceed with our analysis, it is important to note that our coverage is not exhaustive. There is a large and growing multi- and cross-disciplinary literature on AI's impacts on work quality, so there may be impacts along the dimensions we set out that we do not discuss but have been examined in work that our review did not capture. The literature is also unevenly distributed in two respects. First, scholarly attention tends to concentrate on the ways in which AI erodes workers' rights, protections and enjoyment of work more than on the ways in which AI might extend them. Second, some uses of technology are studied far more closely than others. Algorithmic management,

for example, is much better covered by existing research on the quality of work than generative AI. The literature's focus on algorithmic management is partly due to its substantial potential to affect quality of work, and partly because many algorithmic management practices predate generative AI, so scholars had more time to study them. The positive or negative lean of the analysis that follows for each dimension is, in part, a reflection of these choices in the literature.

3.1 AI's impacts on the conditions of work

In our framework, conditions of work cover the terms on which work is carried out, the treatment that workers can expect while performing their jobs and how much say they have in these matters. In this section, we outline the main themes that emerge from the literature on how AI impacts each of the seven dimensions we identified under conditions of work: benefits, fair procedures, health and safety, privacy, stability and security, worker voice, and working time and work intensity. These dimensions are analytically distinct but interdependent in practice. The same use of AI can affect several dimensions, and impacts along one dimension may have knock-on effects on other dimensions.

Benefits

The literature we reviewed identifies two channels through which AI can affect benefits. The first is indirect: benefits can expand or contract depending on whether demand for human labour increases or decreases. The second is direct: AI can enable new ways of providing benefits to workers.

The indirect channel: AI can affect workers' bargaining position. If AI leads to decreased demand for human labour, it can weaken workers' bargaining position and incentivise companies to reduce the benefits they offer (Fukui, Nakamura and Steinsson, 2026). A firm that believes a role could be filled by an AI system that takes no holiday, sick leave, or weekends off has less incentive to offer advantageous terms to a human in that role. Furthermore, a firm might also choose to invest in AI infrastructure rather than in competitive benefits packages to attract talent (Wells, 2026). If, on the other hand, AI increases demand for particular human skills, employers will compete for the people who have them, including by offering improved benefits packages.

The direct channel: AI can increase the range of benefits that companies provide and the ways in which they are able to provide them. For example, where employers compete on geographical flexibility and the ability to "work from anywhere", digital twins – which combine AI, sensor technologies and automation – may significantly reshape the geographical boundaries of work and the possibilities for worker flexibility (Choudhury, 2025). AI may also improve the provision and delivery of worker benefits. For example, AI systems can improve various worker-related insurance services, such as healthcare and employer liability. Surveys find that worker compensation insurers are highly optimistic about AI's ability to improve return-to-work outcomes through improved personalisation, proactive risk management and early intervention (R&I Editorial Team, 2026).

Fair procedures

Algorithmic practices are reshaping the processes through which workers are hired, managed, evaluated and dismissed. A mixed picture emerges from the literature about how these practices affect fair procedures at work. Algorithmic bias in hiring and algorithmic management can undermine them. At the same time, research shows that AI can also improve fair procedures in areas such as performance evaluation and accessibility for disabled workers. We cover each of these areas in turn.

Hiring algorithms can both reproduce and mitigate discriminatory human bias. Algorithmic bias is a well-studied topic cutting across practices in the workplace (Fazelpour and Danks, 2021). However, it has attracted the most sustained attention in the context of hiring, where research not only highlights the extent to which algorithms mirror and exacerbate discriminatory human biases (Drage and Mackereth, 2022; Tilmes, 2022; Hughes et al., 2025; Bommasani et al., 2026), but also the ways in which AI can be used to mitigate them (Kumari, 2025; Praveen et al., 2025).

If employers rely on the same hiring algorithms, the effects can compound across the market. AI is widely used in hiring and candidate job searching (Fennell, 2020), leading to concerns that applicants may be reduced to simplified assemblages of discrete skills. Research has pointed to the emergence of algorithmic monocultures, where employers come to rely on the same algorithmic recommendations, shutting individuals out of multiple jobs (Bommasani et al., 2022) Testing this hypothesis, Bommasani et al. (2026) find that people who submit multiple applications that are screened by the same algorithmic hiring vendor are more likely to be rejected from every position than if companies made statistically independent decisions.

Algorithmic management can leave workers subject to consequential decisions that they struggle to understand and contest. Algorithmic management in the workforce is a distinct and widely studied set of phenomena, related to the use of software systems to allocate, monitor, evaluate and discipline work (Kellogg, Valentine and Christin, 2020). It predates generative AI and even machine learning. Examples of algorithmic management in use before contemporary AI include rule-based shift scheduling and keystroke logging.

Our review surfaced a range of studies that demonstrate real worker concerns about AI-powered algorithmic management tools. The concerns highlight three related elements: pervasive data collection (which we cover in greater detail under "Privacy"), combined with algorithmic inference (which may rest on models trained on biased data), informing increasingly agentic AI decision-making.

Existing research documents workers' concerns around the misuse of their data in hiring and firing, the increasing opacity of decision-making and falling trust (Kellogg, Valentine and Christin, 2020; Soffia et al., 2024; Stefano, 2025; Mateescu, Nguyen and Pinto, 2026). Some researchers report calls from workers for outright bans on AI use in key procedures like hiring (Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023).

Algorithmic management practices can leave workers subject to potentially unfair and opaque automated decisions without an understanding of how outcomes are generated or why decisions are made. This constrains workers' agency and ability to exercise their rights in relation to working conditions, progression and job security (International Labour Organization, 2026).

AI can, however, make evaluation processes more consistent. When designed, developed and deployed carefully, AI-powered solutions can benefit workers. Some studies are finding that a significant proportion of workers surveyed in finance and manufacturing believe that AI is improving their interactions with managers by improving the consistency of evaluation processes (Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023).

AI-powered accessibility tools can remove some of the disadvantages that disabled workers face at work. Fair procedures also cover employers' accessibility requirements. AI has made a positive difference in this respect. Speech recognition, live captioning and dictation systems powered by large language models (LLMs) have the potential to improve day-to-day task performance and colleague interactions for those who would

otherwise be at a disadvantage at work (Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023). Almost half of the finance and manufacturing workers surveyed in a 2023 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study believe that AI will improve access for workers with disabilities (Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023).

Health and safety

One way AI is changing the nature of work is by altering how tasks are being performed, for example through new forms of automation, delegation and human–AI collaboration. Another is by monitoring both the humans and the machinery involved in manufacturing processes (Fiegler-Rudol et al., 2025). AI's effects on health and safety run in two opposing directions. On the one hand, AI is improving physical safety. On the other hand, the monitoring that delivers these gains can come at the cost of workers' psychological health. We cover each direction in turn, noting also that AI-driven automation is not always the most appropriate way to improve safety.

AI is reducing physical risk at work and workers report feeling safer as a result. Multiple reports find that both workers and managers think that AI is improving physical safety at work. It is being used to monitor equipment and notify workers if there are any faults with machinery, to monitor humans and alert them if they are too physically close to machines, and even to send alerts if train drivers are becoming dangerously tired (Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023). In some cases, the more dangerous tasks can now be performed entirely by robots, for example, sorting of refuse in recycling plants (Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023) or autonomous vehicles replacing workers in mines (O'Connor, 2026). Workers themselves are reporting that they feel safer at work, particularly those working in manufacturing jobs (Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023; Soffia et al., 2024; Pissarides, Thomas and Review Team, 2025; O'Connor, 2026).

The monitoring that delivers the physical gains can come at the cost of workers' psychological health. Data collected for safety monitoring purposes may become bound up with managerial practices that tilt from safety monitoring to broader workplace surveillance. Such a tilt can have negative impacts on psychological wellbeing. Even well-intentioned implementations of AI to monitor physical safety can end up creating a pervasive environment of algorithmic management that negatively impacts the psychological health of employees (International Labour Organization, 2026). We discuss the privacy dimension of data collection below.

AI-powered automation is not always the answer for improving safety in the workplace. Jobs regarded as dangerous or unhealthy may not inherently be this way. For example, employers may sustain dangerous and exploitative conditions in roles often assigned to vulnerable, marginalised workers (Riek and Irani, 2025). In such cases, ensuring that employers improve conditions and provide human workers with proper safety equipment or training may be the answer, rather than automation.

Privacy

As AI systems make it possible to expand the scope and scale of data collection at work, the line between legitimate collection and intrusive surveillance blurs. The literature raises consistent concerns about the ways in which AI presents new threats that undermine an individual's right to privacy (Solove, 2025). The power asymmetries present in the workplace heighten these concerns (Kellogg, Valentine and Christin, 2020). There is a delicate balance to be struck when introducing AI systems that can improve services for workers or improve worker safety through monitoring or risk prediction (Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023; Jetha et al., 2025) but depend on the collection and processing of personal, behavioural and sometimes biometric data (International Labour

Organization, 2026). Where the adoption of AI systems in the workplace increases the scope and scale of personal data collection and processing for employees, this increases their vulnerability to abuses of power through unexpected, inappropriate, or otherwise unwanted use (Nissenbaum, 2004).

Workers themselves identify these risks. Employees in finance and manufacturing have expressed concerns about AI systems using their personal data for monitoring and evaluation (Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023). Recent research also highlights the concern that algorithmic monitoring through wearables or digital surveillance platforms blurs the boundaries between legitimate managerial oversight and intrusive control that undermines workers' autonomy and dignity (International Labour Organization, 2026).

Stability and security

Five prominent themes emerge from the literature that we have reviewed when it comes to AI's impacts on job stability and security. We cover each area in turn.

Automation and commoditisation make workers easier to replace and more vulnerable to insecure contracts. Existing literature identifies three key ways in which AI can be deployed: automation, augmentation and commoditisation (Dorobantu et al., 2026). Two of these three AI deployment mechanisms affect job stability and security. Under automation, AI substitutes for labour on a specific task, which can make the jobs built around those tasks less stable and secure. Under commoditisation, AI simplifies tasks without automating them, reducing the skill level required to perform the job. As a result, workers become increasingly disposable and more vulnerable to insecure contracts (Fukui, Nakamura and Steinsson, 2026).

Where displacement does occur, workers may move into work of lower quality. AI exposure and adaptive capacity are highly correlated, with many highly exposed occupations containing workers with strong means to transition to other work. However, for clerical and administrative roles which are also highly exposed, workers have a low expected adaptive capacity. Their options for accessing decent and meaningful work may be limited, and they may find themselves pushed into lower quality employment if they are displaced by AI (Manning and Aguirre, 2026). Moreover, as pointed out by the Global Labor Institute, this new work may be increasingly informal in nature, where AI automation reduces stable salaried roles and relegates workers to more piecemeal project work with lower protections (Mexi and Krasley, 2026). Consider the example of Videogamer, where 20 writing staff were fired and told to reapply for new roles training AI "writers" (Waugh, 2026), showing how formality and informality of employment are not distinct categories but two ends of an employment continuum (Nataraj, 2016) affected by AI.

Fear of displacement can affect workers' wellbeing and their career prospects even in cases where the displacement never occurs. A growing body of evidence suggests that workers in a variety of sectors fear that AI adoption will eclipse their abilities (Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023; Partridge, 2025; Pissarides, Thomas and Review Team, 2025). Such fears can fuel anxiety and impact mental health even where this perception is inaccurate. In a large-scale international survey of software developers, anxiety about ongoing employment was highest among developers in roles characterised by high levels of automation. These fears may be misplaced, given that further automation is difficult in precisely those areas where high levels of automation have already been achieved (Krzywdzinski, 2026).

The fear of job displacement can affect workers' current and future careers, regardless of whether it is justified. Case study evidence indicates that workers' psychological resistance and fear of displacement can act as barriers to accessing high-quality roles (Oliveira, Carvalho and Faria, 2025).

Employer announcements of replacement also give rise to worker fears and instability across the market, as in the case of Klarna's 2024 announcement that AI agents could handle the work of its 700 customer service representatives, followed by a partial reversal in firing plans (Dobkin, 2025).

AI has enabled the growth of platform work, a precarious form of work that is at risk of becoming even more insecure. AI has made it possible for platform work business models to thrive in settings where matching algorithms underpin services such as ride hailing and delivery optimisation. These jobs are well understood to be less stable and less secure, due to workers being treated as contractors rather than employees and therefore not being protected by the same labour laws (Raikes, 2024). They sit in legal employment loopholes and produce an atomised workforce that makes worker organisation extremely difficult (European Trade Union Confederation, 2026; European Training Foundation, 2026), thereby limiting the ability of unions to shape technological development through collective worker voice (Hussain, 2024). Continued improvement in AI-enabled robotics and self-driving capabilities can make platform work even more precarious. Driverless robotaxis like Waymo threaten 100,000 private hire driver jobs in London alone (Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain, 2026).

The AI supply chain is also a source of insecure work. The AI supply chain is not a case of AI being integrated into an existing workplace, but it warrants attention here for two reasons. First, it is a growing sector in economies around the world as a result of accelerating AI adoption. Second, it is a sector where workers who are displaced by AI may end up.

The growth of "microtask" work, for example, which is generally performed by workers on short-term contracts, is part of the AI development process (Gmyrek, Berg and Bescond, 2023). This involves training AI with human oversight and human inputs, so that systems can learn how to classify images or mirror human physical movements accurately. In the area of content moderation, job security relies on meeting rising targets while being subject to algorithmic management (Ouzar, 2026). As AI technology advances, some of these roles are being made more insecure. In 2025, for example, TikTok fired 400 content moderators, citing increased use of AI (Booth, 2026).

Worker voice

When it comes to the impact of AI on worker voice, two important questions emerge from the literature. The first is how AI may impact established processes through which workers' voices are heard. The second question is how workers' voices are included in decisions about AI. The two questions are connected, because the extent to which workers' voices feed into decisions about AI depends on the institutional capacities that AI may erode. We cover these important points below.

AI is weakening the conditions under which collective representation operates. Parts of the literature are turning their attention towards the fact that workers' hands are weaker because AI is altering the "conditions under which social dialogue operates" (European Training Foundation, 2026, p. 59). AI-based employee monitoring and evaluation systems are complex and opaque, centralising organisational knowledge and making it harder for worker organisations to represent their members' interests – unless they make a case for not using the systems at all. Evidence also suggests that interrogating the decision logic of algorithms for individual cases is becoming harder (Krzywdzinski, Schneiß and Sperling, 2025).

Labour protections and institutional power determine whether workers are involved in decisions about automation and the introduction of AI. Existing research shows that good jobs accompany automation where workers have labour protections and institutional

power. It also points to the important differences that exist between the German approach, where machine workers have a seat at the table in corporate governance, and the American command and control approach, where the distance between managers and machinists gives rise to manufacturing problems and stymies resolution (Head, 2014). Participation of works councils has shown promise in shaping AI adoption positively for employees in Germany, but the complexity of AI and the pace of change pose a challenge to existing co-determination processes (Krzywdzinski, Gerst, and Florian Butollo, 2023).

Outcomes improve for firms and workers when workers are consulted about AI adoption. Across a range of studies, the evidence demonstrates improved outcomes for workers and firms when workers are consulted about AI system design and adoption (Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023; Butler et al., 2025; Pissarides, Thomas and Review Team, 2025). Evidence from the OECD shows that consultation with and training for workers plays an important role in achieving better job quality outcomes when considering AI systems in the workplace (Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023). This is consistent with established perspectives that have long understood that workers adapt systems to their particular use cases in novel and creative ways, which can lead to unpredictably positive outcomes (Orr, 1996; Suchman et al., 1999; Doellgast et al., 2025). Organisations will not only need to focus on the design of technologies, but also on building workers' capabilities and instilling agency so they can collaborate with AI in fulfilling ways (Ashraf et al., 2025).

There is evidence that worker consultation can lead to win–win outcomes for both firms and workers even when it comes to the introduction of algorithmic management systems. Productivity and efficiency gains can be combined with improved work quality. An experimental study involving three German manufacturing firms showed how full agreement between managers and workers concerning all system features can be achieved through consultation. In two of the three settings studied, agreement was reached on even the most contentious features affecting worker autonomy (Milanez, 2025).

Working time and work intensity

The literature we reviewed identifies three main ways in which AI affects working time and work intensity. It accelerates the pace at which work is done, it shifts cognitive demands from easier to more complex tasks and it adds to the pressure that workers feel to be "always on". We cover each finding in turn.

AI accelerates the pace of work, continuing a historical pattern that has accompanied new technologies. The primary mechanism for understanding how AI impacts work intensity is through its effects on the pacing of work: both the rhythm of performing sequentially distinct tasks as well as the rate of carrying out individual tasks. Since AI can speed up the information processing required for decision-making, it is easy to see how this can accelerate both the sequence of task completion and individual tasks, leading to an overall increased experience of work intensity, performance pressures and stress or burnout (Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023; Jetha et al., 2025) For example, content can be produced much more quickly using generative AI tools, which may create heightened productivity expectations for workers. The intensifying effect of AI on work is consistent with a broader historical pattern in which technologies promoted as labour-saving have raised rather than reduced the demands placed on workers (Wajcman, 2016).

Generative AI is changing the composition of cognitive demand, removing the easy tasks, such as drafting emails or taking notes, that used to provide a break from the hard ones. The introduction of generative AI means that knowledge workers must now increasingly switch from the more varied pace and thought processes of "creative" tasks to adopt proofreading and corrections roles (Pissarides, Thomas and Review Team, 2025).

This impacts not only on the pace of work, but also the cognitive demands workers face. There is emerging evidence that employees are starting to experience higher degrees of work intensity, particularly where AI is speeding up simpler tasks. Overall, workload is not reduced and the complexity of the remaining tasks is greater (Ranganathan and Ye, 2026).

AI can extend the working day by adding to the pressures workers feel to demonstrate their availability. There is substantial evidence that tracking worker behaviours through key stroke analysis, screen time and mouse movements damages wellbeing, leading individuals to work while sick and to work excessive hours (Glavin, Bierman and Schieman, 2024). While some of these monitoring techniques predate it, AI has become another feature of an "always on" work culture, expanding capabilities for workplace surveillance and making it increasingly "difficult to disconnect from work" (Soffia et al., 2024, p. 8).

3.2 AI's impacts on the nature of work

Apart from affecting the conditions of work, AI can also affect the nature of work. In this section, we focus on the main themes identified in the literature regarding AI's impacts on each of the eight dimensions that fall under the nature of work in our framework: "Autonomy", "Contribution", "Enjoyment", "Relationships", "Skill development and excellence", "Sense of achievement", "Social recognition" and "Value alignment".

Autonomy

Autonomy at work can be understood narrowly as having discretion over one's tasks and over the order in which these are performed (Soffia et al., 2024), but it can also involve deeper questions of moral agency (Vredenburgh, 2022). The literature finds that the effects of AI depend on whether a worker manages with AI or is managed by it and on whether the worker retains a sense of professional identity. We outline the main findings that emerge from the literature below.

The effect of AI on autonomy depends on the worker's hierarchical position in the workplace. Survey evidence finds that one in five respondents believe that AI is undermining their autonomy, noting that "this share is larger among the relatively small group who report to be subject to algorithmic management" (Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023, p. 130). The 2023 OECD Employment Outlook demonstrates that a combination of seniority and education level has impacts on workers' perceptions of job quality with AI: managers and workers with AI-related skills, or with tertiary degrees, report higher job satisfaction and improved health when utilising AI systems, while those subject to algorithmic management report the least positive outcomes (Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023). Findings like this draw attention to a concerning, emerging divide between those who use AI in the management of others and those who are increasingly subject to such management. The former category report higher degrees of autonomy, while the latter report the opposite (Kellogg, Valentine and Christin, 2020; Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023; Monod et al., 2024; Soffia et al., 2024; Stefano, 2025; Islam, 2026).

The gig economy is the starkest case of workers seemingly having autonomy, despite them having little formal autonomy in practice. Research highlights the use of AI-powered algorithms in the gig economy to define, monitor and evaluate workers' output. It also argues that these algorithms are deployed by managers to sustain specific regimes of labour control, increasing asymmetries between them and their workers (Muldoon and Raekstad, 2023). Such practices run counter to how technology companies employ the language of flexibility and autonomy when they describe the key benefits of gig economy work (International Trade Union Confederation, 2025).

The literature finds that the degree of professional identity that a worker retains following the introduction of AI makes a substantial difference. Beyond task discretion, the literature notes that "AI may negatively affect workers' (moral) agency, autonomy or responsibility" (Santoni de Sio, 2024, p. 412). Workers can experience a loss of autonomy through the automation of tasks that previously provided meaning and conferred professional identity. A study of loan professionals found that when trained workers are expected to defer decision-making to AI, the consequential impact on skills is experienced as "a loss of competence", and that workers lose responsibility and autonomy where they "can no longer intervene in the decision making nor change the result, even if they disagree with it" (Mayer, Strich and Fiedler, 2020, p. 247). In this example, the workers may retain autonomy over the sequence in which they complete their tasks, but they lose the ability to exercise skill and discretion. This loss of autonomy could give rise to "accountability gaps" (Santoni De Sio and Mecacci, 2021), whereby humans lack the ability to explain decisions that they do not fully own or understand.

Contribution

The opportunity to feel that one's work is making a positive contribution to society – to something beyond oneself – is an essential source of meaning and, for many people, the reason for their chosen career (Terkel, 1974). Positive narratives about AI's productivity impact are often framed in terms of contribution: AI promises to automate mundane tasks, complementing workers' skills and giving them back the time to apply their skills where they are most needed. We illustrate two findings that emerge from the literature below. We rely on examples from health, but note that the same findings apply to work conducted in other sectors, such as education or social work.

Where AI improves the output of their work or enables workers to prioritise their unique skills, it can enhance their contribution. Consider the example of health workers. Perennially understaffed and under-resourced, doctors and nurses are under immense strain to manage high volumes of patients. Much of their time is taken up with administrative tasks, like updating patient records, as well as more complicated decision-making about diagnoses and treatments. AI has the potential to ease some of the administrative burden, as well as to improve the accuracy of diagnoses and the precision of individual treatment programmes (Faiyazuddin et al., 2025). Doctors recognise these benefits. A survey of doctors' perspectives in the UK shows that 62% report an increase in productivity and improved clinical decision-making as a result of AI (Esnaashari et al., 2025). Such improvements can lead to an increased sense of contribution.

When thinking about contribution, we should also consider the perspectives of those whom the work serves. Continuing with our example from the healthcare domain, an improved sense of contribution for workers in care settings needs to be balanced against the perspectives of patients. There is extensive research indicating how important it is for patients to "preserve the essential human connection in patient–provider communication" (Foresman et al., 2025, p. 11). Where AI improves a clinical output at the cost of the relationship through which care is delivered, a worker's contribution may be enhanced on one measure and diminished on another.

Enjoyment

Arguments that AI can have positive effects on enjoyment rely on similar reasoning to that underpinning the case for improved contribution, namely that automating tedious tasks leaves workers free to concentrate on what matters most. While contribution asks whether work is more useful, enjoyment asks whether work is more rewarding to perform. We highlight two findings from the literature below.

Some workers report enjoying their work more, but they tend to be those who develop AI or manage people who use it. Evidence suggests that the adoption of AI in the workplace is making work more enjoyable for some workers (Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023; Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023). This evidence supports the contention that the automation of routine and tedious tasks enables workers to concentrate on those they find enjoyable. It is important to emphasise, however, that the workers reporting higher levels of enjoyment were more likely to be those developing AI or managing people who use it. Enjoyment, therefore, follows the same pattern that the literature identifies for autonomy: the gains tend to accrue to the workers directing the AI systems rather than those being directed by them.

AI can take on tasks that workers enjoy, leading to a decrease in enjoyment. The basic argument in favour of AI is that if it automates the more tedious and routine tasks, workers will have more time for challenging and creative ones (Murray, Rhymer and Sirmon, 2021), which they enjoy more. With the rapid advances in AI capabilities over the past two years, in particular, this narrative appears to lack nuance. As AI disrupts and displaces ever more sophisticated or "human" capabilities, the scope for human work-related flourishing seems to be shrinking (Abrams, 2026).

Relationships

Productive and supportive working relationships and a sense of community are important features of overall work quality. The introduction of AI into the workplace can affect relationships in two ways. AI can reshape existing relationships between human colleagues and it can also replace them altogether through the introduction of agentic "artificial colleagues" that take on roles that humans used to occupy (Bieber and Unruh, 2025). We cover below three findings that emerge from the literature we reviewed.

AI is individualising work in ways that can disrupt the collaborative occasions through which relationships form. One emerging concern is that AI undermines collegial relationships by disrupting traditional workflows and expertise in workplaces. With the arrival of generative AI tools in particular, "non-specialists can increasingly bypass these traditional pathways, independently handling tasks that once required domain expertise" (Baygi and Mayer, 2025, p. 5).

What might be cast as a participation or skills accelerator can therefore have adverse effects by leading workers to over-confidently "dabble in tasks outside their usual roles. For instance, employees in non-technical roles can now tackle projects that previously required specialized technical input, such as creating dynamic dashboards or writing Python scripts" (Baygi and Huysman, 2026, p. 5). This can disrupt the social fabric of organisations, where previously communal and collaborative tasks, including those requiring more specialist expertise, now happen in a siloed fashion, rather than serving to build a vibrant and trusted working environment (Retkowsky, Hafermalz and Huysman, 2026).

These individualised work patterns are leaving some workers feeling isolated (Green, Salvi del Pero and Verhagen, 2023). Case study evidence suggests that the erosion of human interaction, whether real or perceived, shapes how successfully workers navigate AI-driven change at work (Oliveira, Carvalho and Faria, 2025).

Agentic 'artificial colleagues' cannot replace human relationships in the workplace. Existing research identifies three main forms of relationships at work: professional collegial relationships which "can yield the goods of solidarity and recognition"; collegial friendships, which "can generate the goods of emotional support and appreciation"; and collaborative collegial relationships, which "can yield the goods of shared experience and shared achievements" (Bieber and Unruh, 2025, p. 60). The same study expresses skepticism as to

whether relationships with artificial colleagues can yield these goods and concern about them "crowding out" human relationships.

As well as impacting relationships between workers, AI will also impact the relationship between providers of services and their recipients. Insights from over 100 in-depth interviews reveal how the labour involved in connecting face-to-face work is being systematised, increasing its potential for automation. The same study argues that "connective labour" is central to millions of jobs, not only in sectors like healthcare and education, and that it comprises three elements: empathetic listening, emotion management and the act of "witnessing". If AI increasingly automates these roles, the losses will be experienced unevenly, with only the well-off retaining the option of buying high-quality, human-facing services (Pugh, 2024; Wajcman, 2025).

Skill development and excellence

The literature identifies three directions in which AI can affect skill development and excellence: it can support the development of capabilities, it can erode them and it can change how a worker's expertise is perceived by others regardless of what that worker can actually do. We discuss each of these below.

AI can support the development of skills when it augments human cognition. Across sectors, positive reports are emerging where AI is being used to enhance critical thinking skills. Research communities are being built around precisely this goal: ensuring that the augmentation of human cognition precipitated by generative AI does not prevent humans from continuing to "learn, build skills, and grow expertise" (Tankelevitch et al., 2025, p. 2). There are signals that, for some workers at least, the prospect of learning how to lean into AI-powered work is exciting. A recent study reports that workers expressed optimism about opportunities for skills development, and that "learning new systems rekindled their enthusiasm for their job, making them feel more competent, engaged, and satisfied" (Pissarides, Thomas and Review Team, 2025, p. 143).

Workers' capabilities can atrophy through disuse when AI substitutes for human cognition. As AI capabilities expand, covering ever more complex tasks, it is likely that concerns will continue to grow about the erosion of human skills and expertise (Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023; Mateescu, Nguyen and Pinto, 2026). Studies have already begun to evidence the "cognitive atrophy" caused by relying on LLMs for memory retrieval and writing tasks (Kosmyna et al., 2025, p. 10). This concern has been most acute in the case of young people, where excessive reliance on AI can compromise the development of independent critical thinking, problem-solving skills and creativity (Giansanti and Cosenza, 2026). Elsewhere, workers report that they no longer have the opportunity to develop reflection skills in work-related decisions and are consequently becoming "indifferent to the outcome of the process" (Mayer, Strich and Fiedler, 2020, p. 249).

AI is changing how workers' expertise is perceived by colleagues, independently of the skills they hold. A concrete effect of AI use in the workplace is the creation of "workslop" and its resulting impact on the subjective perception of workers' skills by colleagues (Niederhoffer et al., 2025). One study reports that half of the people surveyed "viewed colleagues who sent workslop as less creative, capable, and reliable than they did before receiving the output. Forty-two percent saw them as less trustworthy, and thirty-seven percent saw that colleague as less intelligent" (Niederhoffer et al., 2025, para. 15). This suggests that AI's role in generating high-volume, low-quality work is eroding workers' perceptions of one another's expertise, undermining trust and introducing an unhealthy cynicism into workplaces. It's also worth noting that the study found that this cynicism affected female engineers disproportionately.

Sense of achievement

Workers' sense of achievement can be diminished when the integration of AI into the workplace prevents them experiencing the outcomes of their work as their own (Santoni de Sio, 2024, p. 414). This is the flip side of the finding described above under "Contribution": a worker's contribution can rise while their sense of achievement in producing it falls. We cover two findings that emerge from the literature below.

Workers can lose their sense of achievement if AI performs the significant or effortful part of a task. Existing research points to the possibility that when AI-driven automation leaves human workers in a purely maintenance or order-following role without "the opportunity to exercise independence and creativity in their jobs", "achievement gaps" will emerge (Danaher and Nyholm, 2021, p. 232). An achievement gap can be understood as the gap between the positive contribution that a worker has made and their sense of achievement from making that contribution. A person acquires a sense of achievement when they play a significant causal role in the output and when the work was effortful to perform. Integrating AI into work processes can undermine both. Other researchers have also noted the loss of meaning that can arise when productive capacity is shifted away from humans, who may increasingly come to see themselves as superfluous to output and divorced from the experiences of effort and achievement that provide people with purpose and pride (Stevenson, 2025).

The appearance of achievement gaps is conditional on how AI is implemented in the workplace and on how far workers retain the planning role. The same authors note that human workers can retain a sense of achievement if they continue to "formulate the abstract plans or work programs" (Danaher and Nyholm, 2021, p. 229). Much will also depend on how far workers are supported to adapt their capabilities, skills and roles to unlock fruitful and fulfilling work with AI. Parts of the literature point to the potential for more "useful" human–AI configurations (Vaccaro, Almaatouq and Malone, 2024) and for AI to "positively transform how we think" (Tankelevitch et al., 2025, p. 2).

Social recognition

Recognition and esteem are important indicators of quality of work. Their absence can leave people feeling undervalued, demoralised and increasingly disengaged from their work (Gheaus and Herzog, 2016). Where the integration of AI systems into the workplace blurs the lines between human and AI-powered contribution, patterns of social recognition may be disrupted. We highlight two findings regarding this dimension below.

Workers lose standing inside and outside the workplace when AI takes over the defining part of a role. Researchers have found evidence of employees losing trust in one another's competence once it becomes organisationally understood that AI is the source of decision-making. Loan consultants in one study reported that the introduction of an AI system "diminished their reputation among their friends and family" (Mayer, Strich and Fiedler, 2020, p. 247) and that they feel that their public image has changed (Mayer, Strich and Fiedler, 2020, p. 248). The loss of standing, therefore, extends beyond colleagues and managers to the worker's wider social world.

Following the introduction of AI in the workplace, managers can struggle to identify an employee's contribution. In a study of the impacts of ChatGPT at work, researchers found that managers can no longer rely on their traditional understandings and benchmarks of high performance in a role. The integration of ChatGPT makes it difficult to distinguish an employee's contribution from the overall work output (Retkowsky, Hafermalz and Huysman, 2024). This evidence identifies managers' struggles with performance recognition and assessment, but raises the important question of whether skills and contributions traditionally garnering recognition and esteem in the workplace will continue to be valued and, if not, where else workers will find recognition.

Value alignment

By mediating the processes through which workers are hired and managed, AI systems can affect employees' ability to find work that matches their values and to judge whether the organisation they work for shares them. The hiring effects discussed under "Fair procedures" have a direct impact on this dimension. A worker that is rejected across many employers by the same AI system is forced to choose on the basis of what remains available, rather than on the basis of their values. Two further findings emerge from the literature.

AI systems can also reduce the possibility for value alignment by degrading individuals' moral autonomy and their ability to make free and informed choices within the workplace. The use of AI as an algorithmic management tool increases the opacity with which workplaces are organised and tasks are assigned. AI-infused production processes can undermine workers' autonomy by preventing them from understanding the structure and functioning of their workplace, and consequently from adopting certain attitudes towards it (e.g. endorsement, rejection) based on this understanding (Vredenburgh, 2022).

As objections to AI become a matter of principle for some workers, its spread may leave them with few employment options that do not conflict with their values. Workers may develop principled and deeply held positions about the ethics of AI and how it should be used in the workplace, if at all. Such opposition could relate to growing sustainability concerns, objections to exploitation in AI supply chains, and resistance to the encroachment of AI on human skills, competencies and forms of expression (Bearne, 2025). Should AI become a ubiquitous part of the working world, many could find themselves in ethical conflicts, where the only available work undermines their sense of moral agency.

3.3 Summary of findings

In this section, we outlined prominent ways in which AI affects each dimension of quality of work. A mixed and complex picture emerges, whether we examine conditions of work or the nature of work. Nevertheless, a few patterns that hold across multiple dimensions emerge when considering the evidence base as a whole.

AI deployment can simultaneously improve and diminish work quality. Across the evidence base, benefits and harms often arrive through the same channel. AI-powered monitoring both makes physical work safer and weakens privacy and psychological health. Automating tedious tasks removes both drudgery and the respite from more difficult work. Hiring algorithms both mitigate human bias and exacerbate it at mass scale. Efforts to address AI's impacts on the quality of work need to consider how to balance these conflicting effects.

The output of a worker can rise while the value they derive from it falls. This pattern recurs throughout the subsections on the nature of work. Contribution from workers can rise as output improves, but their sense of achievement in producing the end product or service can diminish, unused expertise can atrophy, and individual contributions can become harder for managers to identify and reward. As with the previous finding, the effects of AI deployment pull in opposite directions, making it difficult to get the balance of benefits and harms right for workers.

Agency matters: workers who manage AI have a better experience than those who are being managed by it. This finding recurs across the literature we reviewed, including the subsections on "Autonomy", "Enjoyment", "Fair procedures" and "Health and safety". Workers reporting gains in terms of work quality tend to be those who direct or build AI systems, while those reporting losses tend to be those whom the systems direct or monitor.

Consulting workers about AI deployment leads to better outcomes. There is a strong evidence base showing that when workers are asked about AI systems and given the chance to influence design decisions, outcomes improve not only for workers but also firms. This remains the case even for the contested case of algorithmic management. There is a clear link between this finding and the previous one. Consultation is one of the ways to give workers more agency over how AI systems are designed and deployed in the workplace.

Many of the issues covered in this section existed long before the use of AI in the workplace. Themes that emerge strongly across the dimensions, such as power imbalances, discriminatory practices, insecure contracts and excessive monitoring, long predate the emergence of AI. AI can introduce new impacts on workers, such as the need to work alongside agentic systems, or generative AI changing the composition of cognitive demand. These new impacts require fresh thinking. However, the majority of the impacts outlined above relate to existing practices in the workplace that are being replicated or scaled up by AI.

Informal work deserves more attention than it currently receives. Several of the effects covered in this section push work towards the informal end of the labour market, by expanding forms of work that sit outside standard employment relationships, displacing workers from formal roles into less secure ones, or creating new forms of precarious work within the AI supply chain. Where this happens, the impacts described in this section arrive without the protections that formal employment provides. The evidence base offers insufficient guidance here, as it overwhelmingly studies formal employment.

Beyond these overall patterns, the evidence makes it clear that AI's effects on work quality are unevenly distributed. Impacts are situational, depending on the context in which workers find themselves, warranting a deeper dive. We turn to this topic in the section that follows.

4. AI's differential impacts on quality of work

Having outlined the potential impacts of AI's integration into the workplace on various dimensions of work quality, we explore two areas where AI will give rise to differential impacts:

1. Who does the work? The same AI system will have significantly different impacts on workers depending on where they are within their career and the extent to which they are affected by structural inequalities.
2. Where does the work take place? The country in which a worker is based affects the labour protections they have, the AI systems their employers adopt and the cultural context shaping technological choices.

4.1 Who does the work?

The existing literature suggests three key ways in which the individual-level sociodemographic characteristics of workers shape the extent and nature of AI effects.

Career stage shapes the impact of AI on work quality, often correlating with age, expertise, occupational identity and skill development needs. Even where aggregate employment levels are unaffected, emerging evidence suggests that AI may be changing the nature of entry-level roles. It is automating some of the routine process-based work that was traditionally the role of junior employees, meaning that they might miss out on skill development opportunities and vital experiential learning (Edmondson

and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2025). These junior workers may simultaneously experience a "seniorisation" of entry-level roles. Where routine work is automated by AI, junior roles shift towards more complex cognitive skills, judgement and relationship building (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2026). While this shift in core tasks may lead to increased contribution and provide workers with greater social recognition, without the time spent learning foundational skills, junior employees' fit for a role may become poorly aligned.

Mid-career workers appear to benefit more from AI, with their experience and tacit and contextual knowledge enabling them to use it more effectively (Riemer and Peter, 2025). This aligns with experimental findings that intermediate levels of domain expertise are optimal for algorithm-augmented performance (Allen and Choudhury, 2022). Late-career workers, by contrast, may face impacts on job stability and social recognition where accumulated skills are devalued and their ability to adapt is constrained by lower levels of digital and AI skills (Eurostat, 2024).

Structural inequalities will influence AI's impact on the quality of work, though the evidence on how exactly they will do so is thin. There is strong historical evidence that the introduction of new technologies and automation in the workplace affects systematically marginalised groups most severely (Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2021; Autor, 2022). The effects are compounded by the increased likelihood of these groups experiencing hazardous, precarious and low-quality work (Jetha et al., 2025). AI is likely to follow these trends unless very careful thought and consideration are given to how AI is designed, developed and deployed.

Inequalities may also further perpetuate through the occupations that different demographic groups hold, which are unevenly exposed to AI. Social class, race and gender differences lead to both horizontal segregation of workers across occupations and vertical segregation within the same field (Charles and Grusky, 2004). Women are statistically more concentrated in service and administrative sectors, where routine tasks are highly exposed to AI (United Nations, 2025), and a study by the ILO found that "in high-income countries, jobs with high automation potential constitute 8.5% of female employment, compared to 3.9% of male employment". (Gmyrek, Berg and Bescond, 2023, p. 31). From a job quality perspective, workers in these sectors will have less scope to use AI to augment or complement their work than those in more male dominated sectors, where AI is less likely to replace roles. Similarly, in the UK, workers from ethnic minority backgrounds and workers with disabilities are disproportionately represented in the gig economy (Cockett, 2023; Jeraj, 2025; Hudson, Ahonen and Bataj, 2026), making them more exposed to the negative job quality effects of AI, such as algorithmic management, performance tracking and surveillance, facilitated through the "platformisation" of labour (Pesole, 2025). There is a growing need for evidence on how these structural factors interact with the newest versions of AI systems.

4.2 Where does the work take place?

The impacts of AI on job quality also depend on where workers are based. Organisational context, regulatory environment and access to digital infrastructure shape AI's effects as powerfully as individual characteristics. There are stark global inequalities across these dimensions.

Organisational choices that affect AI's work quality impact are shaped by the broader legal and regulatory environment. A country's legal and regulatory environment influences the type of AI systems that are adopted, the pace of adoption, the scope of worker protections and the incentives of organisations adopting AI.

Emerging AI regulation in parts of the world provides some protections for workers, setting rules on which systems can be used in the workplace and how they may be deployed. The European Union's (EU's) AI Act provides protections for workers through explicit bans on using AI to infer workers' emotions and to develop social-scoring systems. The Act also provides protections for high-risk uses of AI in the workplace, including for recruitment, task allocation, evaluation and contract termination (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2024). However, the proposed EU AI Liability Directive, which would have established employer accountability where AI caused harm to workers, was withdrawn in 2025, leaving liability rules for workplace accidents and unfair treatment of workers involving AI unresolved (European Trade Union Confederation, 2025). In the UK, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has published a Model AI and Employment Bill, which would regulate employers' use of AI systems and provide for trade union rights in relation to the use of AI (Trades Union Congress, Allen KC and Masters, 2024).

Beyond AI-specific regulation, workers' experiences of AI will be shaped by the strength of existing labour law and workplace rights. In this area, the differences globally are stark (World Justice Project, 2024). Such laws will shape the degree to which AI can make workers' jobs more precarious and affect working hours and intensity; determine the protections workers have if AI systems are used to discriminate against them or place them in physical or psychological danger; and influence the ability of workers to organise and the protections provided to those who call out wrongdoing.

Whether AI changes the conditions or nature of work depends on access to the technology and critical underlying infrastructure. At a global level, workers in developed and developing economies will be impacted differently by AI. In the Global South, roughly 60% of workers, some two billion people, engage in informal sector labour (International Labour Organization, 2018), and are thus at greater risk of being subject to design choices and policy decisions informed by ill-fitting evidence, weighted heavily towards the Global North. Developed economies are more readily able to capture the benefits of AI, already possessing the basic digital and data infrastructure, connectivity and skills that adoption requires. LLMs, now a fixture of modern life for those in developed economies, remain largely inaccessible to the 2.2 billion people who do not use the internet (Pirlea and Corso, 2026). Lack of access will cost workers possibilities to expand their capabilities, exercise their freedom and secure their wellbeing in work, as the "AI divide" becomes another factor of the "global digital divide" (Yu, Rosenfeld and Gupta, 2023).

Who AI systems are designed by and for will shape the impacts they have on quality of work for their users. Where workers in developing economies use AI in the workplace, this will mostly be as "AI takers", in a consumer position reliant on AI software and infrastructure from the Global North, with limited control over the development or integration of these systems. LLMs underperform for non-English languages and particularly low-resource languages such as Swahili and Burmese (Pava et al., 2025). Experimental evidence has further shown that LLMs produce significantly more unsafe responses for non-English queries, which could disproportionately place the health and wellbeing of workers in non-English-speaking contexts at risk (Wang et al., 2024). Relying on foreign models may mean adopting AI systems that are not aligned with local values, norms or workers' needs. This mismatch will have real effects on the performance of these models in the workplace, making it difficult for workers to understand decisions and harming their ability to trust and interact effectively with these systems. For example, cattle herders in Kenya using image recognition models found that they regularly misdiagnosed indigenous breeds of cows as undernourished due to being trained on Western breeds (Effoduh, 2024). The disparity in access to high-quality AI is a significant emerging issue of global labour justice.

5. Conclusion

This report tackled the question of how AI may impact upon the quality of work from the perspective of workers. We developed a framework of 15 dimensions spanning the conditions and nature of work, and evaluated the evidence against each, drawing on a wide and expanding literature from across social science disciplines. What emerges is a more complex and ambiguous picture than either optimistic or critical accounts of AI suggest.

The evidence shows that benefits and harms frequently arrive through the same channel, so for many of the dimensions there are simultaneously both positive and negative effects. AI can reduce the likelihood of some negotiated benefits for workers, but increase the range of direct benefits, such as flexible working. It can increase bias in hiring, particularly when effects are compounded across the market (as firms use the same algorithm) or a lack of transparency prevents workers perceiving bias. But AI can also make evaluation processes more consistent and mitigate disadvantages for workers with disabilities. AI can make physical work safer, but often at a cost of workers' psychological health because of the monitoring involved.

For other dimensions of working conditions, the picture is less equivocal, with largely negative effects. For privacy, AI systems expand the scope and scale of data collection and have an inbuilt tendency to blur the line between legitimate collection and intrusive surveillance. With regard to stability and security, AI-driven automation can make workers easier to replace and more vulnerable. Even when displacement does not materialise, fear of it can affect workers' wellbeing. AI has a strong tendency to increase work intensity: as easier tasks are automated, they no longer provide respite from more demanding ones, and the pace of work accelerates in unsustainable ways.

The evidence highlights a huge range of experiences of AI effects for workers, according to who they are and where they are in the world. For workers in senior positions in organisational hierarchies, dimensions of the meaning of work such as autonomy and enjoyment can improve. Reductions in administrative burden can increase workers' sense of making a positive contribution to society, particularly for health professionals. But for those at lower levels, the value derived from work can fall, skills can atrophy through disuse and contributions can become harder for managers to identify and reward. Relationships can be impacted in ways that erode collaboration and community, and human colleagues may in future be replaced by agentic artificial ones. The sense of achievement that gives work meaning can erode even as productivity metrics improve. The effects on workers in the gig economy are the most extreme.

Several findings from this report emerge as priorities for policymakers, employers and worker organisations. Where evidence does exist, it points towards a set of levers that can shape AI's effects on work quality for the better. When workers are involved in decisions about AI adoption and system design, outcomes improve for both them and their employers. There is strong evidence that consultation with workers leads to win–win outcomes. Workers adapt systems to their particular use cases in ways that generate positive outcomes that no top-down design process would anticipate. AI itself might be used to build consultative mechanisms into organisational processes. Worker voice should be treated as a helpful input to good AI deployment, rather than an obstacle.

Many of the harms documented in this report are not new. Power imbalances, discriminatory hiring practices, insecure contracts and excessive monitoring long predate AI. AI can replicate and scale these existing dynamics, often at speeds and volumes that outpace existing legal and institutional protections. In doing so, it highlights injustices and might in some circumstances make them more visible and likely to be tackled, while at the

same time making it clear that regulation designed for a pre-AI world will be insufficient. Existing labour law was not designed for algorithmic management, platformisation, or AI-enabled surveillance at scale, and significant gaps remain even in developed economies. The path towards worker-centred AI development is available – but it requires deliberate choices by employers, governments and worker organisations.

The evidence base is overwhelmingly concentrated on formal employment in developed economies. There is a huge evidence gap for the impacts of AI on the two billion workers in the informal economy, the growing proportion of workers in non-standard employment relationships, and the many workers in the Global South who will be users of AI systems designed elsewhere, in other languages, for other contexts. Closing this gap is a condition for ensuring that policy responses do not systematically favour those already best served by existing labour market institutions. Researchers, funders and policymakers must work alongside workers and industry to build a systematic evidence base.

The trajectory of AI's impacts on quality of work is not fixed. Workers, employers and governments face choices about how AI is integrated into work processes and regulated. A richer evidence base would inform the kinds of human–AI interaction that technologists and policymakers should seek to discourage or embrace. Much of the evidence we reviewed captures AI in its earlier phases of deployment, in slices of the economy where research has been possible, through instruments not always designed to measure what matters most to workers. That is not a reason to ignore the evidence, but to treat it with caution, neither overstating the harms nor assuming that positive early signals will persist as AI systems become more capable, more autonomous and more deeply embedded in working life. Most importantly, we need a research agenda that systematically monitors and measures the effects of AI on the conditions and nature of work. Such an agenda would create indicators that could act as powerful inputs to decisions about how to develop, deploy and govern AI.

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