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Work shift

How to create the AI-powered office of the future

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Work shift

How to create the AI-powered office of the future

If most companies seem happy with some form of hybrid work arrangement, the next big thing to figure out is: where do you begin with a workplace AI policy?

In this report, we break down how a founder/CEO should think about an AI implementation plan for their business, gathering advice and insights from leaders who've already let AI systems run loose in their organisations.

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FOREWORD FROM **zoom**

Personal productivity assistants are now at your fingertips

There's a core truth we're all facing: human connection will never be the same again. Today's workplace looks different. Teams are widely distributed, fundamentally changing the way we connect and communicate. With this shift, along with advances in technology and AI, customer expectations have become more sophisticated. AI can help you get the job done, and it is already a game-changer in the way people approach their work overall. Generative AI can help compose proposals or outlines for reports, draft chat and email messages, and so much more. It creates a framework for you to build on and helps reduce the time it takes for you to complete repetitive tasks.

Incorporating [AI into your workday](#) can seem like a daunting task, especially if you're not familiar with the technology. How can AI help you? What AI tools should you use? Trying to answer these questions and more might prevent you from uncovering the potential of an AI assistant. [Zoom AI Companion](#) is your everyday companion for navigating your workday. That's why we deliver it at no additional cost to customers with the paid services assigned to their Zoom user accounts. Global teams, take note: AI Companion has expanded language support beyond English to be able to generate meeting summaries and to give users the ability to ask in-meeting questions in 32 additional languages (in preview).

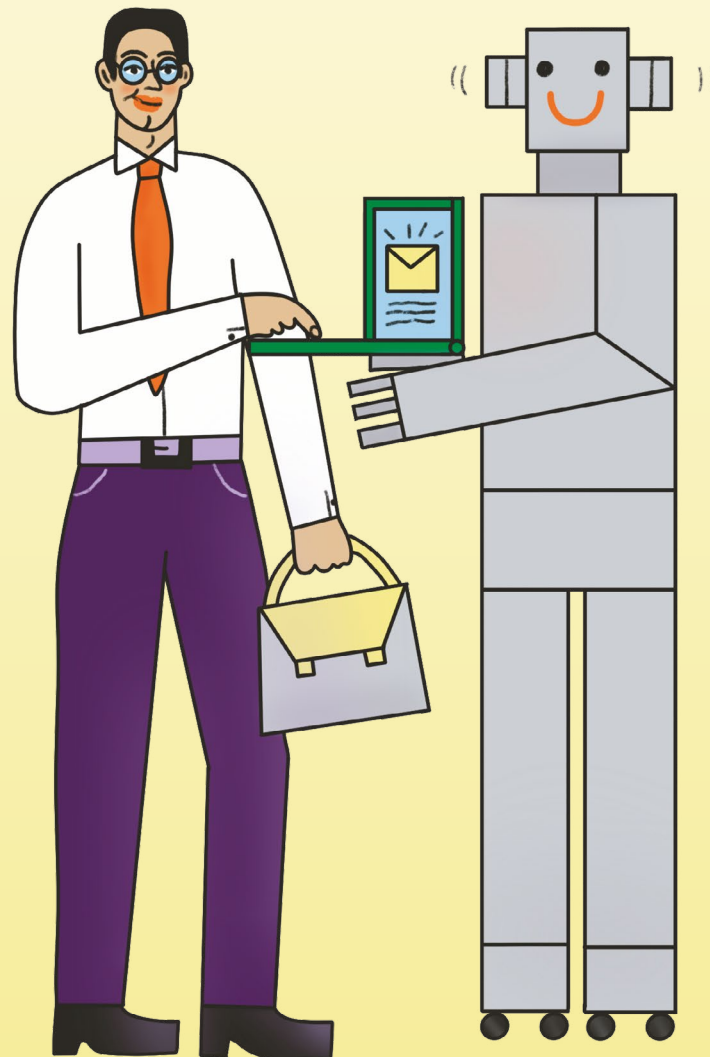
AI Companion's capabilities can help you save time and be more productive at work. If you activate AI Companion during your Zoom meetings, it will automatically generate a summary of what's discussed after that point and send it to the host afterward. You can also set it to turn on automatically at the start of your meetings. The meeting summary captures what you need to either catch up on a topic or brief someone who missed that particular meeting: an executive overview, discussion summary by topic, and action items by a responsible person. Or, use AI Companion's summarisation capabilities with [Zoom Team Chat](#) thread summary to help you quickly catch up on long chat threads. In [Zoom Whiteboard](#), you can submit prompts the AI uses to generate ideas that can help you get the ball rolling in your next brainstorming session.

Zoom has offered AI-supported capabilities such as background noise suppression, virtual backgrounds, live translation and transcription to enhance communication for years. The large language models (LLMs) we use to provide AI Companion include Zoom's LLM, as well as third-party models from OpenAI and Anthropic. [Our federated approach](#) means that we can also incorporate newer LLMs in the future, and we plan to allow customers to use their own models in the future to continue to improve the end-to-end experience for Zoom customers.

AI will continue to change the world of work. But so did the smartphone, the computer and the word processor. We have an opportunity to adapt to these changes. We can leverage the new capabilities and integrate them into our workflows to get more done in less time. AI also supports a hybrid approach to work that most employees (and managers) favour. Offices can become flexible hubs that empower teams to communicate intelligently and easily. AI capabilities can assist you in real-time, like when Zoom Meetings blurs your background, recognises your gestures for reactions or suppresses background noise. As futurist Sophie Hackford stated: "AI is always science fiction. Once it arrives, it simply becomes technology."

INTRODUCTION

Say hello to your new AI coworker



It's 2024 and we still haven't entirely returned to the office after the pandemic — and this seems to suit everyone just fine. The majority of white-collar work is now hybrid — in other words, not fully remote and not five-days-a-week-in-person either. And the big development of the year? Everyone's getting a new AI coworker.

The next chapter of work concerns rapidly advancing generative AI (GenAI) technology, the rollout of which has been likened to the arrival of the internet or the smartphone. Today's tools can help to produce text, audio, video, music, code, images and design in response to prompts, capabilities that can help automate tasks and cut down on grunt work. According to a June 2023 Productboard survey, 90% of VC-backed startups plan to leverage GenAI in their products.

CB Insights counts more than 360 companies that specialise in GenAI — a number that will only grow. The market intelligence provider says that in the first half of 2023, investment into GenAI startups went up five-fold to \$14bn, a steep rise from the \$2.5bn invested in the entirety of 2022. Europe's AI startups took home 17% of this sum in those six months — rising from 11% in 2022 — while 11 European AI companies raised rounds of \$100m or more this year, according to the recent State of European Tech report published by VC firm Atomico.

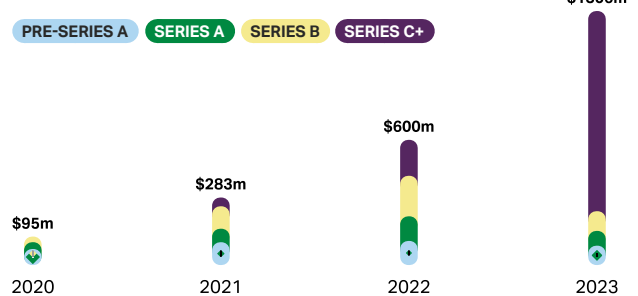
An immediate example of GenAI in the workplace? All of a sudden, colleagues are sending companions/copilots/assistants — these tools go by several names — to meetings on their behalf to take notes with a precision we've never seen before. AI tools are also helping us draft emails and chat messages, summarise meetings and chat threads, as well as brainstorm. Want to knock out the first draft of a report? GenAI's got you covered.

AI's proponents say we're going to see sweeping change for business, with the potential for AI to replace big chunks of the workforce and put a rocket under productivity for those who remain.

A recent Gartner poll of more than 2,500 executive leaders found that 45% reported that recent hype around GenAI had prompted them to increase their own budget allocation to developments in AIs. 70% said their company is in "investigation and exploration" mode with GenAI, while 19% are in "pilot or production mode".

GenAI funding has shot up

VC funding for European GenAI startups



Source: Dealroom (data collected 30 Nov 2023)

Still, change, especially at big companies, takes time. In many cases, the AI hoopla has far outstripped companies' ability to adapt. Some leaders and workers are diving into the technology wholeheartedly, but others may find it scary to begin engaging with AI. Employees — keen to stay ahead of the curve and lighten their workload — are waiting for their bosses to give clear guidelines and training.

What's clear is that leaders need to get to grips with how the tech can affect their businesses in the near term — and here's where our report comes in.

It will offer valuable insights into how AI is poised to shape the future of work, with stories and insight from founders, experts and investors. It investigates state-of-the-art GenAI used in the workplace, gathers examples of how companies are applying the technology today, as well as looking at where it might take us in the future.

In chapter 1, we'll start with an overview of how companies are figuring out the hybrid office and beginning to incorporate AI tools.

In chapter 2, we break down how a founder or a CEO should think about — and create — an AI implementation plan for their business, gathering advice and insight from leaders who have let AI systems run loose in their organisations. Call it an AI cheat sheet — a "how to" for implementing the technology in your business.

We don our futurist hats in chapter 3 and ponder how companies could decide to use AI in new kinds of work (including work we can't yet imagine). Finally, we'll get experts to weigh in with their predictions for the future.

CHAPTER I

How are offices making hybrid work work in 2024

Founders tell us how AI is already leading to a new evolution of the workplace



When Rosemarie Diegnan cofounded the management software platform Wazoku in London in 2012, it took a while to get the idea off the ground.

“Our premise was that organisations have teams of people who have all kinds of information, insights and opinions that could help make the company better, but they have no way to share that information. The original idea was to democratise the workplace and make it easy for everybody to provide feedback. [Until then], most people didn’t see it as a systematic way of working. Everything was very top down.”

Since then, Wazoku has grown to a team of 95 people and is working with the likes of HSBC bank, drugmaker AstraZeneca and space agency NASA to crowdsource ideas and drive innovation. In 2022, the company raised £8.5m in a Series B round from Octopus Ventures and acquired the Danish “collective intelligence” platform, Mindpool.

“There’s now much more willingness to understand the need to have a way to engage people.”

Rosemarie Diegnan, cofounder, Wazoku

The pandemic and shift to remote and hybrid working has definitely helped prove the need for this type of technology, Diegnan adds. “There’s now much more willingness to understand the need to have a way to engage people, to get them talking and collaborating with each other. [Business leaders couldn’t] keep pretending this isn’t the way people work.”

Flexible working policies, imposed in a hurry in 2020, have become a mainstay for organisations of all sizes and sectors. According to one study, 30% of workers regularly worked from home last year across the EU on average, rising to 65% in the Netherlands and 52% in Sweden. The shift in work patterns is raising questions about communication, productivity, culture and the right tools to facilitate the transition. Alongside that is an ever-growing depositary of data that needs to be managed, understood and protected from nefarious actors.

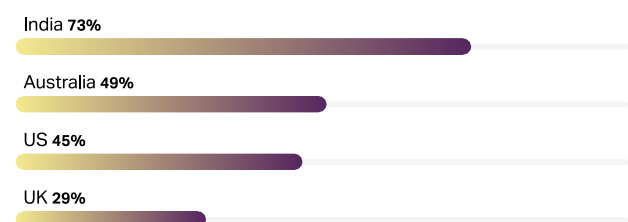


ENTER AI

The recent leaps and bounds in AI capabilities and large language models (LLMs) are providing answers to some of those questions. AI has the potential to bridge gaps between on-site and remote workers, empower them to share information and collaborate better, automate mundane tasks, and provide instant access to the most relevant data securely. In the future, experts believe the phrase “hybrid work” will not only mean a combination of office and remote working, but how humans and GenAI tools will divide the very tasks themselves.

Everyone's dabbling with GenAI

Recent Salesforce survey finds that enthusiasm for tech differs by region



Source: Salesforce, September 2023

According to research by the International Data Corporation, 20% of European organisations have already made significant investments in GenAI and 58% are considering it. Most anticipate the more significant benefits of the tech to be around knowledge management, software development, customer and employee experience.

“In our 2023 top 40 companies on campus, 25% were AI. We’ve never had a trend that was so present in our annual top companies list.”

Roxanne Varza, director, Station F

Startups are moving fast to be on the front foot. London-based Synthesia, an AI-powered video maker, recently raised \$90m in a Series C round and became the UK’s latest unicorn. In Germany, Aleph Alpha offers a platform to help businesses and governments develop GenAI tools and research, and has raised over €500m so far. US startup Poolside AI, meanwhile, which is working on an LLM tool that can write code, recently relocated to Paris after a \$126m seed round backed by French billionaire Xavier Niel.

To meet the sudden rush of interest in AI, Niel’s Parisian startup incubator, Station F, announced it would be launching two AI programmes this year. “We have seen a ton of interest for both programmes,” says Station F director Roxanne Varza. “In our 2023 [list] of the top 40 companies on campus, 25% were AI. We’ve never had a trend that was so present in our annual top companies list.”

AI IS ‘CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK’

There’s never been a more opportune time to redefine how we work, says Kurt Muehmel, AI strategic advisor at French machine learning startup Dataiku. Remote work has set the stage for GenAI acceptance, he argues. “Thanks to remote work, so much of our communication is now in written emails [and other platforms], or it has the potential to be transcribed because it’s over Zoom or another platform and they all have in-built automated transcription tools,” he says.

“That wasn’t the case when we were all sitting around in an office. We’re now capturing a lot of communication in a way that can be converted into text and fed into these LLMs to do all sorts of cool things, like summarise discussion points, extract key takeaways and automate some of the follow-up that needs to be done.”

These features can help turbocharge the workday, helping minimise mundane admin. According to a [recent survey](#) conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of Zoom, 58% of employees spend an hour or more a day on messages, emails and follow-ups, but Zoom AI Companion, for example, can summarise content from meetings and other written communications, as well as draft content.

London-based Tariq Rauf, founder of the enterprise intelligence startup Qatalog, says the first time GenAI independently expanded on an idea he had, it blew him away. “I was frozen for about a week. It was pretty clear that was going to change everything.” Qatalog, founded in 2019, is a platform built to be a work hub to centralise people, teams, projects, goals, documentation and processes. Two years later, “it was pretty clear GenAI was going to do all of that. So we took a huge bet and we re-architected all of our systems to run on GenAI. We think of GenAI as less of a system to chat to and more of a system that can govern other systems.”



CREATIVITY ENHANCERS

Presentation software startup Pitch, based in Berlin, has benefited like many other startups from the remote work shift. In 2021, it raised \$85m in a Series B round, led by investors Tiger Global and Lakestar, and recently released a GenAI feature to generate customised templates. "We have a core belief that AI will not replace human creativity," Adam Renklint, Pitch CTO and cofounder, says. "But we want to enhance creativity by automating some things that are not interesting for humans. We're shifting a little bit from being creators to curators."

Internally, Pitch is making use of GenAI too. Sarah Kiefer, the startup's chief marketing officer, says the team is using it to create first drafts of campaign copy, which the team then edits. It's also been helpful for the customer team, automating jobs such as typing up notes after a call. "The obvious next step is using AI to learn from those transcriptions and identify patterns."

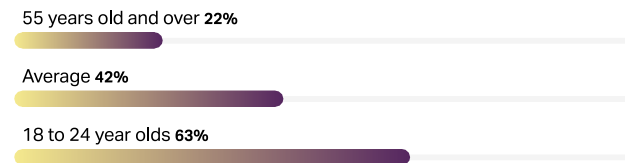
“Our staff don’t feel threatened by this at all. They think it’s wonderful. They want to work on the trickier, more strategic questions rather than answering the same routine questions every day.”

Sarah Kiefer, chief marketing officer, Pitch

"It's not about reducing the size of the team," she adds, about how such automation could impact the workforce. "It's about continuing to handle the volume because our user base is growing so rapidly. We can't scale the size of the community support team in line with ticket volume. Our staff don't feel threatened by this at all. They think it's wonderful. They want to work on the trickier, more strategic questions rather than answering the same routine questions every day."

Almost half of UK workers use AI at least once a week

But generation split is showing



Source: Accenture, October 2023

Note: Survey of 2,002 UK employees in office-based and remote roles carried out between Aug 29 and Sep 1 2023

At Miro, another workplace collaboration platform, GenAI is helping to do at-scale synthesis of customer feedback. The company, which has raised a \$400m Series C funding round, and doubled its user base to 60m people across 200k organisations, receives around 50k pieces of feedback per month from various channels. "You can imagine that kind of body of information. How do you summarise it? How do you make it actionable? How do you route it to the relevant teams?" COO Varun Parmar says.



© PITCH

Team leaders say AI has positive effects on working together



75%

of leaders whose teams use AI say they collaborate better



75%

say they make better decisions



74%

say they are able to work better when they're not in the same location

Source: Zoom

REWRITING 'THE AGILE MANIFESTO'

AI advances mean a lot of the best practices around innovation and collaboration need to be re-evaluated for modern times, Parmar says. "The Agile Manifesto, for example, has 12 key principles. One of them says: 'the most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation'. A lot of the rituals of teams were intended to be in person. That needs to be redefined in this distributed world."

Parmar is running an experiment at Miro, whereby one software engineering team uses GenAI as a work aid and the other doesn't. Comparing the output of the two teams, he finds "a definite increase in productivity" for the AI-enhanced group.

As well as boosting the productivity of developers, there's a huge amount of interest in streamlining knowledge transfer, says Hywel Carver, CEO and cofounder of Skiller Whale, which specialises in live team coaching for development teams. "One of the problems is that as an organisation gets larger, the number of connections between individuals grows [considerably]. Being able to navigate multiple systems

or documents through a single point of contact, and give people answers in a more automated way, is quite exciting. There's a lot we can do to take humans out of the loop in situations that were not a great use of human time anyway."

Of course, there's a risk that taking on more AI tools will make colleagues more autonomous and removed from processes, Meri Williams, CTO of Danish fintech Pleo, says. But new tools can elevate the conversations within the workplace too, she argues. "It means that people are better informed when they go to talk to another human. One of the most interesting things about GenAI and hybrid work is, yes it can make you more independent. But it can also lead to high-quality human interaction. So that when teams do come together, you're spending more time on team building and high-quality decision making, rather than information exchange."

At Qatalog, Rauf believes we're at the start of an epoch moment in technology. "The world was operating on spreadsheets and documents and chats and emails, and the tools didn't seem to get any more sophisticated whether you were a 10-person company or whether you were a 5,000-person company. Now with GenAI, we've gone from building systems for very specific problems to building systems that can solve any problem.

“GenAI does two things. It improves everyone’s communication skills by 50%. And it bumps up everyone’s IQ by 20 points.”

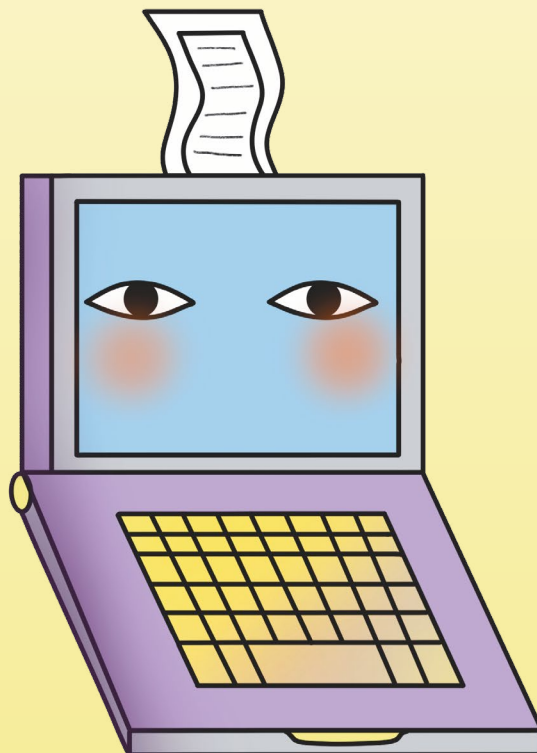
Tariq Rauf, founder, Qatalog

"For hybrid working, I think GenAI does two things," he adds. "It improves everyone's communication skills by 50%. And it bumps up everyone's IQ by 20 points. There are a lot of new methodologies and paradigms to work out [and] we've never had a machine that's as temperamental as this. But I think we've only estimated 1% of what it's going to do. I don't think the world and its systems are ready for what this phenomenal piece of technology is going to achieve."

CHAPTER II

Creating an AI action plan: what companies need to do right now

The next big thing to figure out is: where do you begin with a workplace AI policy?



Startup leaders contemplating where GenAI will make the most impact for their hybrid workforce have some decisions to make. They want to embrace the transformational potential of this technology, but they're not sure where to start. And they also want to establish some ground rules.

A 2023 Insight Enterprises poll found companies are concerned about misinformation, inaccuracy, deepfakes and losing control over content (51%). They're worried about cyber attacks and data breaches (49%). And they're considering how they can avoid limiting human innovation or relying too heavily on technology (39%), as well as the impact on workforce displacement (26%).

Every journey will be different but a good first step is to consider big problems that you want to solve, Miro's Varun Parmar says. According to research by the Boston Consulting Group, AI pioneers typically dedicate 10% of their AI effort to algorithms, 20% to data, and 70% to business and people transformation. "Those big problems will be around revenue-generating activities, reducing costs and [boosting] customer satisfaction," Parmar says.

“Pick a big problem that you want to solve and then look at the tools available. Experiment with a small team and then scale it to the bigger ones as you see value.”

Varun Parmar, COO, Miro

In some instances, GenAI may not be the right tool for the job you've got in mind. "Pick a big problem that you want to solve and then look at the tools available," Parmar advises. "Experiment with a small team and then scale it to the bigger ones as you see value. Don't deploy it to everyone straight away because you might need some tuning, you might need to think about change management. There are a bunch of things that come into play."



Keep in mind the need for human oversight always, he adds. "These models aren't perfect yet. They tend to make stuff up but they present it with a level of confidence that makes you believe it is a fact. One of our core principles for designing these features is we want a human in the loop."

A healthy degree of scepticism is really important when it comes to GenAI, Pleo's Meri Williams agrees. "I had a supervisor at university describe LLMs as a very clever magic eight ball. You're shaking it and asking for an answer. That answer always looks right but it might not be. It's going to be good at translating things, at summarising and articulating things. It's not good at decision-making."

SET GUIDELINES

At Pleo, Williams says there is a lot of interest from the rest of the C-suite to drive the adoption of these technologies. But there's also enthusiasm from the ground level to experiment. She had to be proactive about setting some internal guidelines around using public LLMs before they built their own proprietary model called Leo. "We had to do a big company all-hands meeting to say, 'hey, we know GenAI is very sexy and very cool, but don't upload any customer data to public LLMs, don't upload any personal data to it. GDPR is still really important.' Nobody knows how to make a model unsee something that it's seen."

Most public GenAI programmes store conversations and prompts that are entered into them, using that data to train their models. That information — be it computer code, customer information, transcripts of company meetings, or financial and sales data — could therefore re-emerge in response to someone else's search in the future. Companies such as music streamer Spotify and Deutsche Bank are among those banning employees from using public GenAI tools.

“We had to do a big company all-hands meeting to say, ‘hey, we know GenAI is very sexy and very cool, but don’t upload any customer data to public LLMs, don’t upload any personal data to it.’”

Meri Williams, CTO, Pleo

It's something Berlin-based Pitch has been very mindful of too. “The AI solutions that we've built don't expose any of our users' data to a third party,” Adam Renklint, Pitch CTO and cofounder, says. “We hold internal AI roundtables to make sure that we're talking about this [and] have a holistic view on how we can use AI because everything is changing so quickly.”

Pitch's CMO Sarah Kiefer says there are already opportunities where being able to share certain insights would elevate the customer experience significantly. “We're definitely seeing an expectation from customers that, in the future, they'll be able to generate pitches that take their brand guidelines into account. There's also the opportunity to optimise your pitches based on the performance of prior examples.

“That will require us to look at how you keep data private while finding patterns about what works [e.g. the slides people interact with the longest] that everybody can use. There are a lot of different directions we're exploring but we'll need to be really careful,” she says.

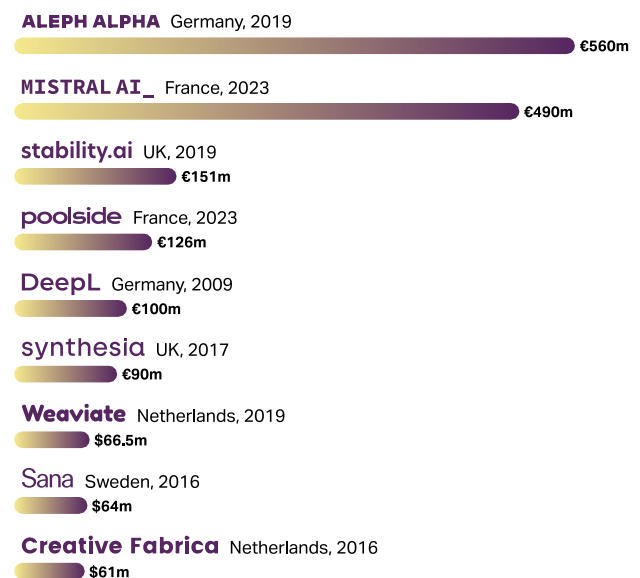
STONE SETTING FROM THE TOP

It's important for leaders to set the tone with this, Renklint adds, while giving staff the autonomy to explore. “A lot of the productivity that we've found hasn't been driven by leadership but by our people finding ways to simplify their days. From a leadership perspective, you need to foster a culture where [using some of these tools] is ok. This isn't about taking a shortcut. It's using GenAI as a step on the journey to make your life a bit easier.”

Although startups typically attract people who are more open to using tech compared to the general public, bringing employees into the conversation about automation can still be a challenge, even if they know change is coming. In Mercer's 2022 global talent trend survey, 71% of workers now say automation will significantly change how their work is done (a significant jump from 44% two years before). Leaders will need to rethink how hybrid teams work together, and how the various workflows, processes and operations will adapt.

Nine European GenAI companies have raised €50m+ since the start of 2022

Funds raised includes venture debt and grants



Source: Dealroom (data collected 25 Jan 2024)

Getting people aligned on a common objective is the first important step, says Juan José López Murphy, head of AI and data science at Globant, one of the few tech unicorns to come out of Argentina. López Murphy moved to the UK two years ago to drive Globant's AI capabilities in Europe. "Whether GenAI adoption is a success or failure will depend on the culture and how the people adopt it," he says. "The bar around what we expect people to be able to do on their own will rise. They will start to work more autonomously."

TRAINING YOUR STAFF

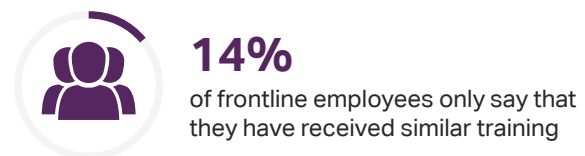
That might require some training, he adds, and it helps to make it playful. "People need first-hand experience in how these things work. AI is going to become a basic competence, like knowing how to work a computer." But it will be a different way of working. "When you were developing software five years ago, for example, you had concrete ways of knowing if an output was right or wrong. Now we can't expect every outcome to be correct. It requires more judgement than before," he says.

At Wazoku, cofounder and chief product and customer officer Rosemarie Diegnan says they've given employees the freedom to find and experiment with GenAI tools, while putting guardrails in place about sensitive customer data. The company then holds internal hackathons where everyone shares what they've found.



Employees are not getting enough AI training

The top down approach isn't filtering through, yet



Source: Boston Consulting Group, June 2023

Note: Survey of nearly 13k people — from C-suite leaders to middle managers and frontline employees — in 18 countries on how they feel about AI at work

"To a large extent, it has been bottom-up but we are consciously watching what people are doing and getting feedback. Some of the team don't want to do certain tasks that are repetitive, boring or just not interesting to them. We want to free people up to focus on things that require a person. But there's still the potential for some fairly significant bias if you're not careful. That's something I really worry about."

WATCH OUT FOR BIASES

In Zurich, Nadia Fischer, the cofounder of Witty Works, an AI-based digital writing assistant that helps users to write inclusively while they're typing, is also concerned some of the advances in diversity and inclusion will be undone by the proliferation of AI tools — particularly those being used by functions such as HR. The startup ran a trial with a local university to determine if GenAI models could write inclusively. The results weren't good.

"It catches the most obvious words but when it gets into more unconscious bias, it's really bad at it. It really took over the biases we have as humans," Fischer says. "I fear companies will take GenAI on without thinking too much and I worry about the amplification of bias as

more people use these tools.” And beyond gender bias, a Stanford study found GenAI tools answered medical questions with racist, debunked theories that could harm patients from a minority ethnic background.

It’s hoped upcoming legislation, such as the EU’s AI Act, will require the providers of LLMs and other foundation models to take reasonable steps to mitigate the risks of bias and/or copyright infringement. “The ecosystem in Europe has an advantage that this technology has been built within the framework of the GDPR and other upcoming regulations in the EU,” López Murphy says. “That will be more business-friendly. Companies know they can go ahead and use it.

Hywel Carver, CEO of Skiller Whale agrees. “Having clarity is helpful. The EU has already drawn a line in the sand with [its] legislation, which helps a lot. If you know where the line is, you can work up to it.”

NOT JUST A TECHNOLOGY QUESTION

Carver believes adopting GenAI will need to happen top-down, but isn’t just a technology question. “It needs much more involvement than just a CTO. There’s also a question of appetite for risk and which tools to use, which is a commercial decision. Right now, GenAI is great at producing a first draft. We still need humans to do the original thinking. We still need developers, for example, to do the architectural thinking and to be responsible and accountable for code.”

“We’re still in a phase where we need human oversight,” agrees Kurt Muehmel, everyday AI strategic advisor at Dataiku. “Another challenge is having a model that can create unlimited quantities of text is not necessarily going to improve the efficiency of those exchanges. In many cases, we don’t need more words to read, we need better access to insights or we need easier communication with our colleagues.”

Leaders need to have an opinion about how this technology could and should be used in their organisation, and to feel the responsibility to set and enforce company rules, he adds. Like Williams at Pleo, he would emphasise this technology isn’t for making decisions in and of itself, but can give leaders access to insights.

“Start as simple as possible and bring your people along on this transition,” he adds. “The best way to do that is by involving them as deeply as possible — getting them to help build some of those systems themselves, helping to test them, providing feedback, so that everybody is part of the process of change.”

So your company wants to use GenAI...

Here are some things to bear in mind



Start by asking what you want these tools for — pick a big problem that you want to **solve**



Foster a culture where the use of these tools is **permitted and encouraged**



But get proactive, too, about setting internal **guidelines**



Host internal **hackathons** to let teams discover how these tools can help their work



Also host internal **roundtables** to reinforce key messages around protecting customer data



Bring in the **trainers**: staff are going to need guidance on how to use new tools

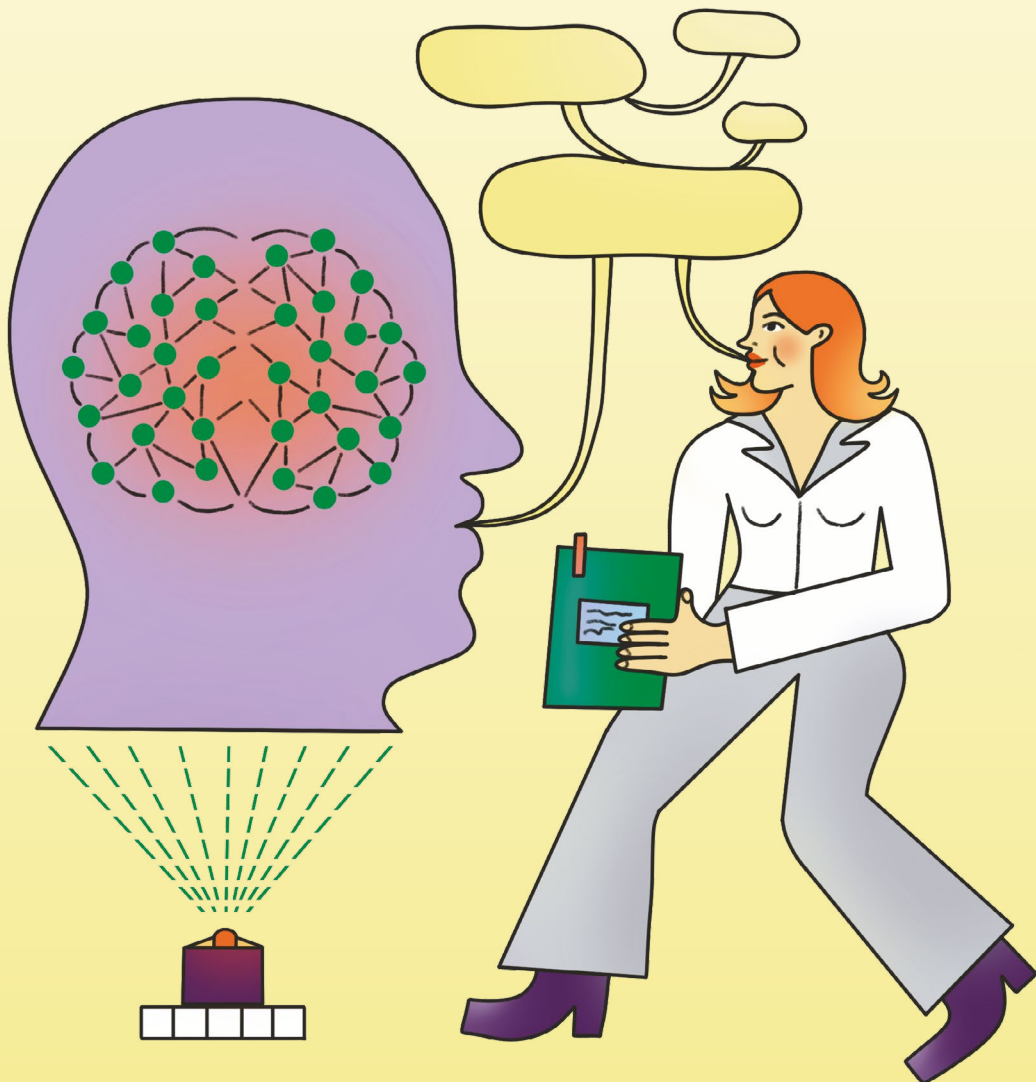


Keep a healthy degree of **scepticism**: check any work GenAI does and watch out for biases

CHAPTER III

The office of the (near) future

**How AI will reshape work in ways
we find hard to imagine**



AI's rapid development has provoked passionate debate about what it means for our future. From the hopeful — “we will all become productive geniuses” — to the alarmist — “sentient machines will replace us” — there is no shortage of hot takes.

This chapter looks into the future and thinks about how companies could decide to incorporate AI in new kinds of ways in the workplace, some beyond our wildest imaginations. We know jobs will be impacted by AI's rollout, but what does that mean? Made better and more equal, or made worse, disappeared, doubled?

GenAI is becoming so powerful that it might make going to the office less of a thing. Already, employees are sending note-taking software to virtual meetings in their place: will the tech evolve to a point where we can effectively clone our work selves, freeing us up to spend more time out of the office?

“I can imagine how an LLM could easily tap into our CRM and summarise the status of every single deal.”

Peter Sarlin, CEO and cofounder, Silo AI

A LETTER FROM THE FUTURE

If we could receive a letter from the future — the year 2030, say — what would we learn about the workplace?

By then, more of us will be working alongside machines and the arrival of chatbots capable of creating text and images in seconds will have raised the stakes for humans.

By 2030, it's possible we'll see the rise of a new kind of job: the automation expert who comes into a company, looks at its processes and then figures out how to automate many of them.

We have consultants who do a little bit of this already: but the ease of building with LLMs will make it a no-brainer from a cost perspective that every company will shoot for more automation. Keep an eye on your LinkedIn profiles for this new kind of guru (Sifted's putting a tenner on the role being called “AI shaman”).

Other things we could see by 2030: sales processes that involve two AI systems talking to one another, with humans in the loop only at the decision-making phase, after both parties have exchanged all the relevant information automatically.

We could also see AI equalising performance by aiding low performing workers. This could help people with fewer skills and less education, and potentially address some inequality in between incomes and professions.

By 2030, all office workers will have their own AI assistants, which will be tailor-made for each role.

“I just came out of a board meeting and I can imagine how an LLM could easily tap into our CRM and summarise the status of every single deal; basically automate a bunch of reports on what's happening in your company,” says Peter Sarlin, CEO and cofounder of Finland's Silo AI, which hopes to make an LLM in every major European language. “It's an obvious [application] for me — and we're not too far from this.”



In our imagined future, these helpers will be central to recruitment arsenals. A company's pitch to prospective candidates: we'll give you a powerful helper and let you finetune it as you please. Perhaps a portion of an employee's bonus will be set aside for upskilling these helpers, or maybe employees will invest some of their learning and development budgets into bootstrapping their AI helpers with new skills.

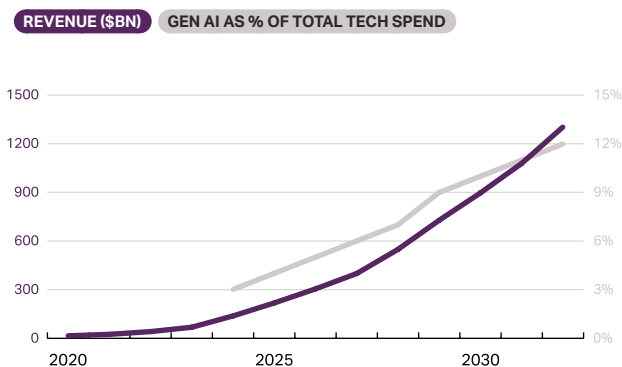
This may result in a new, awkward dynamic when an employee leaves a company — because they will leave behind the helper they worked with. Who will own these helpers? Companies or employees? If it's the latter, could the assistant travel with you, provided they shed all company data beforehand? Could we see new services spring up to help you take your helpers with you?

And by the way: this 2030 workplace we're imagining is smaller than today's. AI will do a lot of the work that previously would have required a large staff. With fewer workers, companies will need smaller office space. Hybrid work — already well established — will take deeper root.

The ability of AI to economise on (some) jobs doesn't mean that we will see mass unemployment, however. While AI will replace many jobs, it will allow many more projects to be started.

GenAI could be a \$1.3tn market by 2032

Bloomberg forecasts 42% growth over 10 years



Source: Bloomberg Intelligence & IDC, June 2023

FUTURE SOFTWARE 'WILL SELL WORK'

These are just a few ideas for where we're going — and undoubtedly the world will continue to change in ways we can't predict. Research provider Insider Intelligence forecasted that by the end of 2023, 25% of internet users in the US — nearly 80m people — would deploy GenAI at least once a month, up from 8% at the end of 2022. It says that proportion will rise to 33% in 2024.

Goldman Sachs estimates that a quarter of work tasks in the US and Europe could be automated by GenAI. At the upper end of its potential, more than 40% of tasks in administration and the legal profession could be automated. This compares with less than one-tenth of tasks in physically intensive professions such as construction and maintenance.

"The biggest movement we will see is that companies that sell software now will, in the future, sell work," says Andre Retterath, a partner at Earlybird VC in Munich. By this, he means that we'll see powerful AI creations capable of performing complex tasks from start to finish.

"Looking at software today, I use about 80 different tools for my work. We have a huge fragmented stack of point solutions and it still requires humans to orchestrate all of them," he explains.

Replacing the tangle of software tools, he says, will be sophisticated "agents": effectively, multiple GPTs bundled together.

"If I'm looking for something to build a website, I'd look at tens of tools today. In the near future, a company will pay for an AI agent to do this work. And as a result, companies can be significantly leaner," he adds.

Ram adds that the quality of AI can be increased by a federated approach. For instance, Zoom uses Zoom's LLM, as well as third-party models OpenAI GPT 3.5 and GPT 4 and Anthropic Claude 2, to increase the tech's performance.

What place do humans have in his imagined future? Retterath says that "AI will outpace the average expert", but there will still be room for the "10x" worker, meaning the top-performing ones.

HOW WE'RE GETTING THERE

Companies are starting to work out what AI might look like for their productivity and profits.

A few see big change on the horizon. Telecom giant BT in May 2023 said that it would replace 10k jobs with AI by the end of the decade, including those associated with call handling and network diagnostics.

“GenAI is going to make it easier for companies to hit the minimum viable product level.”

Charles Gorintin, CTO and cofounder, Alan

Already, we're seeing AI cut down some of the workload at companies. “LLMs can help startups provide value to customers using fewer resources, quicker than they could before,” says Michael Slater, cofounder and CEO of London-based PlayFetch, which has worked with companies on a range of projects, from creating human-sounding chatbots to condensing large amounts of information into bite-size chunks.

“GenAI is going to make it easier for companies to hit the minimum viable product level,” says Charles Gorintin, CTO and cofounder of French digital health unicorn Alan. “[The advent of] AI products means anybody can prototype an idea now: we don't have the gatekeeping of the product/engineering team [like before],” he says.

Traditionally, a product manager would tell a software engineer what to build and then they would go and build it. But now, a product manager and other members of the team have the ability to edit parts of the application, meaning there's much more day-to-day involvement from all parties.

Gorintin gives the example of an intern at Alan who created tools to translate sales presentations into multiple languages. “No engineer would've come and said 'we're going to build this', but our intern created a lot of value for the company,” he says.

With new AI tech, Gorintin anticipates companies will be able to add headcount more slowly. This tech means a “collapse of the talent stack — you don't need eight people to do something, you might just need one person, [so] it removes a lot of overhead. I'm sure you're going to see instances where two people are able to [make big differences].”

The company uses a tool from Paris-based AI company Dust to speed up its operations. “It's able to dive into all the information in our systems and get the right answer. It's incredibly empowering,” Gorintin says.

WILL THERE STILL BE ROOM FOR HUMAN INGENUITY?

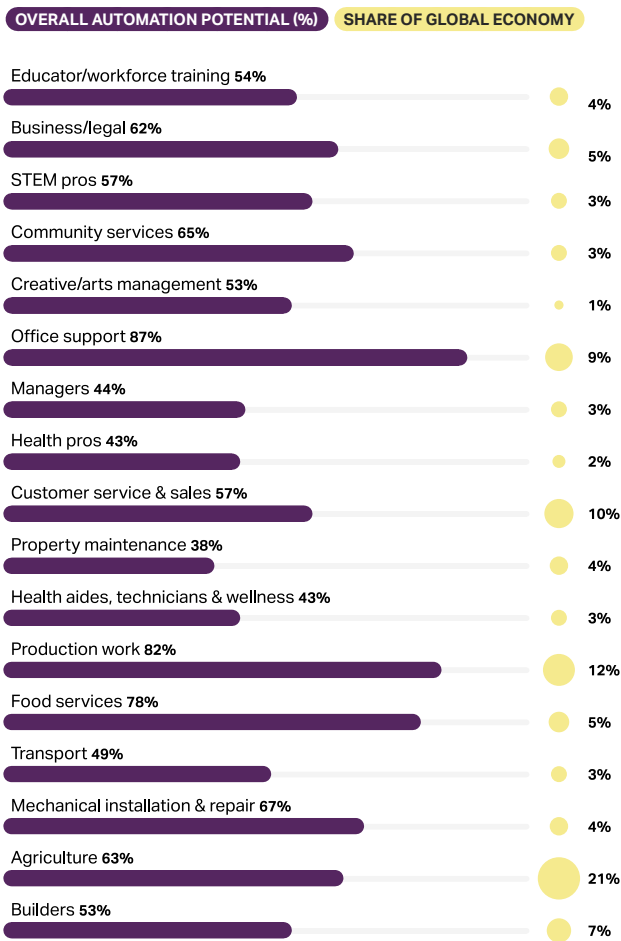
Here's some good news: AI won't nudge humans out of the picture entirely. According to Carl Benedikt Frey, associate professor of AI and work at the Oxford Internet Institute, new AI tools will actually make human connections more important in the future. “There's something about human charisma,” he says. “Only certain doctors are sufficiently convincing to get patients to take their medicine. As AI gets better, the premium on in-person interactions, which cannot be replicated by machines, will become even greater.”

Powerful AI systems will still have to reckon with human foibles. Take the experience of Paris-based Owkin, for example. The company wants to use AI to personalise treatment for every patient. But it needs very good data to do this, which means it needs people like Agathe Arlotti, the company's senior vice president of partnerships.



How much work can GenAI handle?

Automation potential by industry; % that Gen AI could take on



Source: McKinsey & Company, June 2023

Arlotti's job is to forge relationships with the people who run Europe's hospitals and convince them to trade everything from molecular data to slide decks created by pathologists. "Hospitals are not ready to do this, so we have to send our team to build with them," she told a recent conference in Paris. There's also data privacy legislation, created by humans, for startups to understand and get around.

This data question has Oxford's Frey thinking that AI tools might not be as transformative as some people hope they will. "Firstly, the data already ingested by LLMs is likely to comprise a considerable fraction of

the internet, making it unlikely that training data can be significantly expanded to power further progress," he says. "Furthermore, there are legitimate grounds to expect a surge of inferior AI-crafted content on the web, progressively degrading its quality as a source of training data."

Gaining access to data was a multi-year task for another French healthtech startup, Paris-based Nabla, which has developed an AI assistant for doctors and other clinicians. It aims to reduce the amount of time doctors spend on admin: the AI will help with writing up notes, based on conversations that it listens to and transcribes.

The tool, which is currently clocking 4,000 hours of consultations every day, was trained with real physician feedback and is currently in the hands of 20k doctors, says Delphine Groll, Nabla's cofounder and COO.

It's the complexity of making this system — and the requirement for doctors to continuously double-check its work — that makes Nabla confident about keeping ahead of the competition.

"It's a high barrier of entry — you can't do a demo of this in a weekend," says Alexandre Lebrun, Nabla's cofounder and CEO. "We had to build our own dataset from scratch. We had to create our own clinic and get manual signatures from patients. We were also lucky to be a well-funded company," he says.

MORE OUTPUT, LESS INPUT?

We have a bewildering array of software — and yet global productivity rates are barely budging. Are we spending more time managing productivity tools than doing productive work? It's not always clear if new approaches — which business leaders have introduced over the past few years to help in-office and remote workers collaborate — are adding to the clutter or reducing it.

Given the scale of office workload, it certainly feels like a personal AI assistant is necessary. According to a survey conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of Zoom, 58% of employees spend an hour or more a day on messages and emails — and 64% of leaders say they need more time than they have to finish all their work during the day.

If AI systems automate much of the grunt work, it would free us to spend more time on thinking and problem-solving and tap the elusive “deep work” state — a term popularised by productivity evangelist and professor Cal Newport, which involves concentrating on a single problem or project for an extended period without distractions.

There’s some early evidence to suggest GenAI can truly boost productivity. A study by researchers at Stanford University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found a positive impact of AI tools on customer service employee productivity — findings that run counter to the fear that automation carries the biggest threat to low-skilled workers.

Then again, just because you give someone access to a bunch of powerful work tools, doesn’t mean they’ll unlock superhero powers. “For people who have research assistants: some are good at managing them, others aren’t. It’s going to be the same with AI tools, the more skilled you are at managing teams and allocating talent and resources, the more likely you are to prosper,” says Frey.

At the very least, it would be nice if new tools meant we could clock off on time. Morning Consult’s survey also found that 52% of employees and 67% of leaders say they regularly have to work beyond the standard eight-hour work day.

And finally, the big question: will GenAI help usher in the four-day work week? There’s a lot of hope that it can, though this particular wish has remained unfulfilled for the majority of people, despite all the technological advances we’ve seen throughout history.

The prediction that super tech will abolish work was addressed by English economist John Maynard Keynes in his 1930 essay “Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren”. He poses the problem of how we’ll adjust to “unlimited leisure” in the future — but time has since proven that we’re quite capable of finding things to keep ourselves busy.

How we’re using AI

This year, we’ve seen tools do things like transcribing interviews with a precision we’ve never seen before. Tech is on the way to mastering all manner of work admin: meeting recaps, languages translated in real-time, to-do lists and call summaries.

Here are some of the ways AI is becoming an on-the-job performance enhancer:

Zoom users are using its AI Companion to **summarise meetings, take notes and compose chats**.

GenAI is also speeding up the task of **finding music for podcasts**. AIVA is a Luxembourg-based startup that lets you generate songs based on preset styles of music and even lets you choose the key.

Sifted journalists use tools like Stable Diffusion to **make pictures** to accompany our articles.

Paris-based PhotoRoom wants to give every small business owner the ability to produce **studio-quality photos** for their products — and compete with global retail giants with endless marketing resources. Superstar Taylor Swift integrated the app into her website so fans could create a version of her re-recorded 1989 album cover with their own faces in place of Swift’s.

London-based Synthesia, which raised \$90m in June, at a valuation of \$1bn, says almost half of the Fortune 500 list are customers of the UK startup’s computer-generated avatars. Synthesia’s AI software lets people easily make **videos featuring realistic-looking digital replicas**, primarily for training videos and other corporate uses.

Predictions

How AI will reshape work in ways we find hard to imagine

VR/AR will turbocharge work further



"The business transformation will be massive. I am personally also very excited about combining GenAI with augmented and virtual reality tech and creating new experiences we can't even imagine today."

Bianca Anghelina, founder, Aily Labs

No more timezone pain



"The pain that people feel in terms of collaborating across different time zones will be dramatically reduced. We'll all have companions/copilots/assistants that can engage in a specific time zone, summarise things for the employee when they wake up and then action items while they're asleep."

Varun Parmar, COO, Miro

AI will be a work enhancer



"AI is going to be as ubiquitous as electricity and using AI to accelerate your work will become the baseline for what basic efficiency should look like. There's a dystopian version of this, which is why human oversight is so important and organisations need to ensure that they have proper AI governance in place."

Kurt Muehmel, AI strategic advisor, Dataiku

Three-day work week? Probably not



"We're eight times wealthier today than we were when John Maynard Keynes made his statement about a future of 'unlimited leisure', but we still work like crazy. Many prefer higher incomes to more leisure."

Carl Benedikt Frey, associate professor of AI and work, Oxford Internet Institute

GenAI will advance at pace of self-driving cars



"The GenAI revolution, even though it has felt rapid, will still be gradual. Think of it the same way you think of self-driving vehicles: we expected to have fully autonomous vehicles by now, but we haven't yet seen this technology. Still, we're using autonomous features in our cars; it's still creating significant value. It's not going to be full end-to-end automation for a while, but it still helps us."

Peter Sarlin, CEO and cofounder, Silo AI

No more need for four-year degrees



"I think what's going to change is the way people learn and what they're capable of doing. We won't be asking people to have four-year degrees anymore. If you've used the tools that are out there, that's what's going to matter. And that's going to fundamentally change who's doing what, what type of work they're doing and why they're doing it."

Rosemarie Diegnan, cofounder and chief product and customer officer, Wazoku



We'll need to know when to be AI sceptics

"We're going to see an AI-native generation who have always had GenAI tools at their fingertips to help them with tasks such as summarising long documents, for example. Knowing how to be judicious with GenAI, knowing when to trust it and when to be sceptical, is going to be one of the most interesting things."

Meri Williams, CTO, Pleo



We'll need new ways for our brains to relax

"So many menial tasks are moments where our brains can relax a bit before the next in-depth task. If we lose that, how are we going to balance that out? Most of us will have a problem maintaining that mental energy. We will have to find a way to solve that."

Juan José López Murphy, head of AI and data science, Globant



GenAI will only go so far in the health industry

"We believe there's a glass ceiling for LLMs, which are a huge black box with no easy way to guarantee their output is true. There's limitations to LLMs that make them unsuitable for lots of medical tasks and we don't think any LLMs will get FDA [Food & Drug Administration] certification."

Alexandre Lebrun, cofounder and CEO, Nabla



Hybrid work will mean half-human and half-machine

"Hybrid work is going to shift from hybrid in a location perspective, to hybrid in a work perspective. Half of it will be done by us, half will be done by machines. We will just be instructing and verifying, rather than executing."

Tariq Rauf, founder and CEO, Qatalog



CONCLUSION

Make space for more AI coworkers

This report breaks down an AI action plan for businesses, gathering insight and advice from those who've already let AI systems run loose in their organisations.

Key ideas for getting started include carefully picking the problems you want AI to solve; fostering a culture where the use of new tools is permitted and encouraged; and getting proactive by jotting down guidelines, hosting internal roundtables and bringing in outside expertise to upskill staff.

It's not a hallucination: AI is slowly starting to change the way we work — just look at all the companies pushing out AI-enhanced products — and a growing number of industries are likely to be altered by the technology.

AI has the potential to bridge gaps between on-site and remote workers, empower them to share information and collaborate better, automate mundane tasks and provide instant access to the most relevant data securely.

In the future, experts believe the phrase "hybrid work" will not only mean a combination of office and remote working, but how humans and GenAI tools will divide the very tasks themselves.

Some say the AI-powered office is a darker vision, where workers are kept in check by algorithms or replaced by automation.

Others sketch a future where humans can coexist productively alongside AI. Examples of this dynamic exist: in chess for example, AI programmes are good enough to defeat the world's top players. But humans and AI programmes working together are superior to the solo chess programmes.

Some see the technology evolving to the point where workers can delegate big tasks to AI agents, who go off and actually do the steps required to get there.

But the prevailing view today is that AI is more likely to assist workers than replace them. The experts we spoke to envisage AI taking on more and more admin and research jobs, freeing workers up for meatier tasks that let us flex our cognitive and creative skills.

And for anyone still concerned about AI replacing them, a sense of security can perhaps be found when re-reading the thoughts of Oxford Internet Institute's Carl Benedikt Frey, who told us "the premium on in-person interactions will become even greater" in the future.

Acknowledgements

BIANCA ANGHELINA

Founder, Aily Labs

HYWEL CARVER

CEO and cofounder, Skiller Whale

ROSEMARIE DIEGNAN

Cofounder and chief product and customer officer, Wazoku

CARL BENEDIKT FREY

Associate professor of AI and work, Oxford Internet Institute

CHARLES GORINTIN

Cofounder and CTO, Alan

DELPHINE GROLL

Cofounder and COO, Nabla

RATA JACQUEMART

Cofounder and CEO, Differs

SARAH KIEFER

Chief marketing officer, Pitch

ALEXANDRE LEBRUN

Cofounder and CEO, Nabla

KURT MUEHMEL

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JUAN JOSÉ LÓPEZ MURPHY

Head of AI and data science, Globant

VARUN PARMAR

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TARIQ RAUF

Founder and CEO, Qatalog

ADAM RENKLINT

Cofounder and CTO, Pitch

ANDRE RETTERATH

Partner, Earlybird VC

PETER SARLIN

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MICHAEL SLATER

Cofounder and CEO, PlayFetch

MERI WILLIAMS

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