

What Has Been Happening To Manpower And What Is Learned From The Change?

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Introduction

“Manpower” is an older term for the human resources available to organizations and economies, but the underlying issue is increasingly described through workforce capability, skills, labor supply, and job quality. The modern workforce has changed through globalization, demographic shifts, digitalization, automation, artificial intelligence, remote collaboration, and the expansion of service and knowledge-intensive work. These developments have not simply reduced the need for human labor. They have altered which tasks people perform, how organizations coordinate work, and which skills remain valuable when technology changes quickly. The International Labour Organization reports that labor markets continue to face slower job growth, persistent youth unemployment, skills mismatch, and uneven access to decent work, while technological change is transforming occupations rather than uniformly eliminating them (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2025a). More recent work on AI also emphasizes growing demand for cognitive, socioemotional, digital, and AI-related skills (ILO, 2026). The central lesson is therefore that workforce planning can no longer depend on fixed job descriptions. Organizations and workers need systems for continuous learning, adaptation, and responsible integration of technology.

From Stable Roles to Global and Digital Work

Earlier organizational models often assumed relatively stable careers, clear departmental boundaries, predictable technologies, and long periods in which a worker could apply the same expertise. That pattern never described every occupation, but globalization and digital systems have made change more visible and more frequent. Firms can coordinate suppliers, teams, customers, and data across borders, while software platforms integrate finance, logistics, human resources, customer service, and production. These systems can reduce duplication and improve visibility, yet they can also create dependence on complex technical infrastructure. Globalization similarly expands access to talent and markets while exposing organizations to competition, trade disruptions, regulatory differences, and geopolitical risk. The workforce must therefore understand both specialized tasks and how those tasks fit into larger systems. Employees who work only within departmental silos may struggle when decisions require cross-functional data and collaboration. Organizations increasingly value people who can communicate across disciplines, learn unfamiliar tools, interpret data, and understand the

operational consequences of digital decisions. Workforce change is thus organizational as well as technological, requiring coordination rather than merely the purchase of new systems.

Automation, Artificial Intelligence, and Job Transformation

Automation changes work most directly at the task level. A job may contain routine activities that software or machines can perform while still requiring human judgment, communication, accountability, creativity, or physical adaptability. The ILO's 2025 global assessment of generative AI estimated that roughly one in four workers worldwide is employed in an occupation with some degree of GenAI exposure, but concluded that transformation is more likely than complete job elimination because human input remains necessary in most occupations (ILO, 2025b). This distinction is important. Technology can displace some tasks and jobs while creating new roles, changing productivity, and altering the skills required in existing occupations. Workers may need to supervise automated outputs, manage exceptions, verify accuracy, communicate with clients, or make ethical decisions that technology cannot own. The related essay on [technological change](#) is therefore best understood through task redesign rather than simple replacement. The challenge for managers is to decide which work should be automated, which should be augmented, and where human responsibility must remain explicit.

Skills, Knowledge Transfer, and an Aging Workforce

Rapid technological change increases the value of learning but does not make established experience obsolete. Older workers may possess tacit knowledge about customers, equipment, organizational history, risk, and informal problem-solving that is difficult to document. Slagter (2007) argues that knowledge management becomes particularly important when organizations face retirement and demographic change. Effective workforce planning should therefore combine reskilling with knowledge transfer rather than assuming that younger workers bring technology while older workers bring outdated practices. Mentoring can work in both directions: experienced employees share context and judgment, while colleagues with newer digital expertise help teams adopt emerging tools. The ILO's 2026 analysis of AI-era skills identifies adaptability, resilience, human agency, cognitive skills, socioemotional capability, and digital literacy as increasingly important across occupations (ILO, 2026). These competencies are not confined to one age group. Organizations benefit when learning opportunities are available throughout careers and when training is connected to actual job redesign. Skills strategy should anticipate change before a technology implementation creates gaps that are expensive to correct.

Resistance, Implementation Costs, and Organizational Trust

Employees may resist technological or organizational change for rational reasons. A new system can threaten jobs, increase surveillance, reduce autonomy, expose skill gaps, or create more work during implementation. Managers who label every concern as irrational resistance may miss genuine design problems. Successful implementation therefore requires clear explanation of why change is occurring, who is affected, what training will be provided, how performance will be evaluated, and what happens when automation changes staffing needs. Technology also carries direct and indirect costs: licenses, infrastructure, cybersecurity, integration, data migration, downtime, training, maintenance, and process redesign. A system that appears inexpensive at purchase can be costly if workflows are not redesigned or data quality is poor. Trust matters because workers are more willing to learn when they believe management will communicate honestly about consequences. Social dialogue is especially important where AI or automation changes job content substantially. The ILO emphasizes that technological transition should be managed in ways that improve productivity while protecting working conditions and human agency (ILO, 2025b). Workforce transformation is therefore a governance problem as well as a technical project.

My Position in the Global Workforce

Locating myself in the changing global workforce requires a realistic assessment of transferable skills rather than confidence in one job title. Technical capability is important, but employability also depends on communication, problem solving, judgment, teamwork, cultural awareness, and the ability to learn new systems without losing sight of the underlying work. I would therefore treat digital and AI literacy as continuing responsibilities rather than one-time training. Professional networks also matter because knowledge about opportunities, standards, tools, and industry change often travels through relationships as well as formal courses. Adaptability does not mean accepting every technological change uncritically. Workers should be able to question unreliable systems, identify bias or risk, and understand when human review is necessary. OECD research on AI and labor markets similarly emphasizes that technological effects depend on job design, organizational adoption, and worker skills rather than technology alone (OECD, 2023). The strongest career strategy is therefore to combine domain expertise with learning capacity so that new tools extend professional value instead of making knowledge dependent on one platform or employer.

What Organizations Have Learned

The most important lesson from workforce change is that human capability cannot be managed as a fixed inventory. Organizations that treat employees only as labor costs may underinvest in the knowledge and adaptability required for later transformation. Conversely, training without strategy

can waste resources if workers learn tools that are not integrated into processes or career pathways. Effective workforce planning links technology investment with skill mapping, job redesign, succession, knowledge transfer, recruitment, inclusion, and employee participation. The World Economic Forum's 2025 employer survey likewise identifies technological change, geoeconomic pressures, demographic shifts, and the green transition as major forces shaping jobs and skills, though employer expectations should be read alongside public labor-market evidence rather than as forecasts of certainty (World Economic Forum, 2025). The organization of the future is likely to combine people and technology in changing configurations. Competitive advantage will therefore depend not simply on acquiring advanced software but on building institutions capable of learning, evaluating outcomes, and adjusting roles while maintaining trust and accountability.

Conclusion

The workforce has shifted from relatively stable occupational structures toward a more interconnected environment shaped by globalization, digital systems, automation, AI, demographic change, and continual skill adjustment. These forces can eliminate some tasks and create others, but the evidence does not support a simple story in which technology removes the need for human work. Current ILO research instead points toward widespread transformation, with growing importance placed on digital literacy, higher-order cognition, socioemotional skills, adaptability, and human agency (ILO, 2025b; ILO, 2026). Organizations must therefore coordinate technology with training, job design, knowledge transfer, and transparent change management. Workers need to develop transferable expertise while retaining the capacity to evaluate technology critically. My own position in this environment should be based on lifelong learning, professional networks, domain knowledge, and the ability to combine technical tools with judgment and communication. The central lesson from changing "manpower" is that the future of work is not determined by technology alone; it is shaped by how institutions choose to redesign work and how workers are supported through that transition.

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