

AI-Creating Companies: Opportunities for Impact on AI & Job Quality

AI-creating companies can center the participation and well-being of worker end-users in their values and practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM “AI AND JOB
QUALITY: INSIGHTS
FROM FRONTLINE
WORKERS”



PARTNERSHIP ON AI

Across industries and around the world, AI is changing work.

The development and deployment of workplace AI, however, often lacks input from an essential group of experts: the people who directly interact with these systems in their jobs. Despite the direct impact of workplace AI on them, workers rarely have direct influence in AI's creation or decisions about its implementation. This neglect raises clear concerns about unforeseen or overlooked negative impacts on workers. It also undermines the optimal use of AI from a corporate perspective.

“[AI and Job Quality: Insights From Frontline Workers](#),” a new report from the Partnership on AI (PAI) based on an international study of on-the-job experiences with AI, seeks to address this gap. Through journals and interviews, workers in India, sub-Saharan Africa, and the United States shared their stories about workplace AI. From their reflections, PAI identified five common themes:



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REPORT

1

Executive and managerial decisions shape AI's impacts on workers, for better and worse.

This starts with decisions about business models and operating models, continues through technology acquisitions and implementations, and finally manifests in direct impacts to workers.

2

Workers have a genuine appreciation for some aspects of AI in their work and how it helps them in their jobs.

Their spotlights here point the way to more mutually beneficial approaches to workplace AI.

3

Workplace AI's harms are not new or novel.

They are repetitions or extensions of harms from earlier technologies and, as such, should be possible to anticipate, mitigate, and eliminate.

4

Current implementations of AI often serve to reduce workers' ability to exercise their human skills and talents.

Skills like judgment, empathy, and creativity are heavily constrained in these implementations. To the extent that the future of AI is intended to increase humans' ability to use these talents, the present of AI is sending many workers in the opposite direction.

5

Empowering workers early in AI development and implementation increases the opportunities to attain the aforementioned benefits and avoid the harms.

Workers' deep experience in their own roles means they should be treated as subject-matter experts throughout the design and implementation process.

PAI then drew from these themes to offer initial recommendations for key stakeholders in this space: AI-using companies, AI-creating companies, workers and the organizations such as unions that represent them, policymakers, and investors. This stakeholder-specific summary of the report focuses on AI-creating companies, listing opportunities for them to steer AI in a direction that benefits workers as well as their employers.

Actors across the AI investment, creation, deployment, use, and regulation spectrum have opportunities to make decisions that center workers' voices and protect their well-being. These stakeholders have the power to transform AI's trajectory for the better. It is incumbent upon them to use it.

Opportunities for AI-Creating Companies

Core technologies underlying workplace AI tools are created by an increasingly concentrated group of companies. This concentrated group may use them internally and also sell these technologies to other businesses. Values and practices that center the participation and well-being of worker end-users at these companies have the potential for transformative changes in job quality around the globe. These values and practices are all the more important in the market for workplace AI products, one where company leaders and managers are purchasers and the users may be some of the lowest paid and least influential or powerful employees in the company. This market structure means a focus on customers is not necessarily a focus on worker end-users (and vice versa).

These divergences are likely particularly pronounced in companies with strong command and control approaches to integrating AI into their workplaces. Not coincidentally, these companies often employ large pools of low-wage workers most vulnerable to AI's negative effects. Creating better feedback loops and genuinely centering workers will often require seeking out the participation of workers and their representatives beyond their own organizations. There are, however, areas of alignment between the needs and preferences of workers and the incentives of business leaders and managers. While not all of the applications sought by company leaders and managers may be endorsed by their workers, focusing on the overlap adds an additional constituency in support of particular products: the workers/end-users.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

Values and governance

Commit to making worker-centric/worker-friendly AI that increases access to better jobs – especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized workers – by measuring workplace AI products' impacts on job availability, wages, and job quality, and working to eliminate or mitigate negative impacts.

Include workers as participants and key stakeholders in creating any company's AI ethics/responsible AI principles.¹

Recruit staff of diverse backgrounds to AI development teams and actively work to retain them as staff after recruitment.² While representation on its own is not a solution, the relative lack of diversity in AI product teams can contribute to the creation of blindspots that could be mitigated by more diverse teams.³

1 Julian Posada, "The Future of Work Is Here: Toward a Comprehensive Approach to Artificial Intelligence and Labour," Ethics of AI in Context, 2020, <http://arxiv.org/abs/2007.05843>.

2 Jeffrey Brown, "The Role of Attrition in AI's 'Diversity Problem'" (Partnership on AI, April 2021), https://partnershiponai.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2022/04/PAI_researchpaper_aftertheoffer.pdf.

3 Tina M. Park, "Making AI Inclusive: 4 Guiding Principles for Ethical Engagement" (Partnership on AI, July 2022), https://partnershiponai.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2022/07/PAI_whitepaper_making-ai-inclusive.pdf.

AI product origination

Incorporate workers and other end-users' perspectives from the beginning of the product origination process. That is, work forward from problems, challenges, and opportunities identified by frontline and other workers toward products rather than finding ways to shoehorn research progress into workplace products and routines. Collaborate with workers' institutionalized representatives where possible.

“Red-team” potential use of workplace AI products from origination through major update cycles. Without intentional focus, developer and product teams may not identify the potential for misuse or harm.⁴ Eliminate or mitigate identified opportunities for uses harmful to workers, especially in situations where technologies may be sold and deployed in contexts with fewer worker protections than they are developed. Responsible red-teaming and harm mitigation may require companies to not pursue product ideas where harms cannot be mitigated. Particular attention must be paid to the diversity and heterogeneity of use contexts, including ones where potential dimensions of marginalization and inequality (e.g., gender, class, age, ethnicity, race, religion, sexuality, disability status) may not be the same as the cultural and social context of the developing company or team and where existing power imbalances limit the opportunities to reject, restrict, or limit use.⁵

Collaborate with workers to identify areas where they would welcome assistance in completing their work with augmenting AI or automation of non-core tasks, drawing upon the complementarity of humans and AI.⁶

Foster and seek out institutionalized representation of workers, ensuring that workers can offer their authentic views without fear of retribution or retaliation.

When seeking to include the perspectives of workers, recognize that workers from different backgrounds and of different demographic categories may experience workplaces and AI technologies in different ways. Seek broad, representative participation and feedback, and work to ensure workers of all backgrounds feel comfortable and empowered when participating.

AI product development and updating

Take workers seriously as experts in their own roles and include them in product development and future update cycles. Create opportunities for their empowered participation as subject matter experts, not just as end-user testers.

4 Fabio Urbina et al., “Dual Use of Artificial-Intelligence-Powered Drug Discovery,” *Nature Machine Intelligence* 4, no. 3 (March 2022): 189–91, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-022-00465-9>.

5 Aarathi Krishnan et al., “Decolonial AI Manifesto,” accessed July 24, 2022, <https://manyfesto.ai/>.

6 Lama Nachman, “Beyond the Automation-Only Approach,” in *Redesigning AI*, Boston Review (MIT Press, 2021), https://bostonreview.net/forum_response/beyond-the-automation-only-approach/.