PARTNERSHIP ON AI

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

AI-implementing companies can commit to AI deployments that do not decrease employees' job quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM "AI AND JOB QUALITY: INSIGHTS FROM FRONTLINE WORKERS"

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:

READ THE 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-implementing 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-Implementing Companies

Employers that choose to use AI in the workplace have an obligation to ensure it does not decrease their employees' well-being. They also have the highest degree of control in ensuring this outcome. While employers might not directly create the AI-enabled workplace products on the market, they can choose which products to use (or choose to use none at all) and set the contexts and conditions for their use. Employers determine when AI is used (e.g., in core or non-core tasks) and how (e.g., as a decision-support tool with a human worker given the ultimate say or as a final decision-making tool). This set of decisions has profound influence over how workers experience workplace AI, even in cases where employers are using similar AI products.

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.
AI product purchasing	Take workers and their institutionalized representatives seriously as experts in their own roles and incorporate their input into purchasing decisions, including: • Which problems and opportunities to seek AI solutions for. (For instance, seeking technology to support workers in their roles in ways that they have identified rather than the current focus on punitive surveillance tools.) • Which solutions to select out of an AI product category.
AI product implementation	Integrate frontline workers and other end-users' perspectives into the implementation of AI (e.g., workflow and performance targets).
	Give humans working directly with AI systems the final judgment on AI-supported decisions, especially in situations where they could affect workers' performance evaluations and lives outside of work.
	Foster and seek out representation from institutionalized forms of worker organization, ensuring that workers can offer their authentic views without fear of retribution or retaliation.