Investors: Opportunities for Impact on AI & Job Quality

Investors can account for the downside risks posed by practices harmful to workers and the potential value created by worker-friendly technologies.

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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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 investors, 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 Investors

Private investment in AI technologies doubled between 2020 and 2021, directing ever higher amounts to a concentrated group of companies. While angel and venture capital funders have not traditionally focused on the ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) impacts of their investments, the push for higher investor responsibility for climate change and sustainability impacts marks a shift in this attitude. Large institutional investors, similarly, are beginning to articulate an investment thesis of "stakeholder capitalism" inclusive of companies' treatment of workers. In the United States, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which is responsible for regulating government investments, has proposed additional workforce disclosures related to treatment of workers, arguing that they are material information for investors. As AI is increasingly adopted by companies, investors can influence its path by understanding and accounting for the downside risks posed by practices harmful to workers and the potential value created by worker-friendly technologies and practices.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT
Include job availability and quality impacts of AI technology in ESG impact measurements for AI-creating and AI-implementing companies.
Offer and support shareholder proposals to increase workers' voice and well-being.[1]
Request anticipated impact on workers when evaluating proposals and pitches for workplace AI products and companies.
Work with institutionalized forms of worker representation in order to solicit authentic, unencumbered perspectives of workers to incorporate into ESG metrics, stakeholder capitalism initiatives, and other efforts intended to increase worker well-being.

1 "Your Guide to Amazon's 2022 Shareholder Event," United for Respect, accessed May 27, 2022, https://united4respect.org/amazon-shareholders/.