



AI's Unintended Consequences: Redefining Employee Skill Pathways

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Last week, I explored the [Automation Paradox](#) – how AI shifts human roles from routine tasks to more complex, high-pressure responsibilities. Now, let's look at its impact on entry-level roles and what it means for those starting their careers.

AI is reshaping the skills mix in enterprises, automating many repetitive, lower-complexity tasks that traditionally serve as stepping stones for new professionals. Roles like Level 1 IT support or paralegal work – once common entry points – are increasingly being automated or significantly reduced.

The question now is: how will the next generation gain the experience needed to advance?



Why Are Entry-Level Roles Changing?



Automation of Routine Tasks

AI-driven tools are taking over routine tasks. AI-driven tools and chatbots now handle common helpdesk issues instantly, eliminating the need for human intervention. Contract review software scans and analyses legal documents, cutting the workload of junior paralegals.



Demand for Specialised Knowledge

As AI handles grunt work, remaining roles demand higher-level skills – technical, analytical, and interpersonal. For e.g., IT support shifts from password resets to configuring complex systems, interpreting AI diagnostics, and crafting custom solutions.

With routine tasks automated and remaining work more complex, traditional career entry points may shrink – or vanish entirely.

If an organisation no longer has a roster of junior positions, where will young professionals gain the foundational experience and institutional knowledge needed to excel?



The Ripple Effect on Talent & Development

Reduced Traditional Apprenticeships

Entry-level roles have historically provided new hires with an informal apprenticeship – learning basic skills, building relationships, and understanding organisational nuances. Without these roles, new talent may miss out on crucial developmental opportunities.

Potential Skills Gap

By removing the “lower rungs” of the career ladder, we risk ending up with professionals who lack broad foundational knowledge. A fully automated helpdesk, for example, might produce mid-level analysts who understand theory but have never troubleshooted a live system under pressure.

Pressure to Upskill Quickly

New recruits may have to jump directly into more complex responsibilities. While this can accelerate learning, it may also create undue stress if the proper structures for training, mentoring, and support are not in place.



STRATEGIES TO CREATE NEW SKILL PATHWAYS

#1 Reimagined Entry Pathways for New Employees

- 1. Rotational Programs.** One way to fill the void left by disappearing junior roles is through rotational programs. Over the course of a year, new hires cycle through different departments or projects, picking up hands-on experience even if traditional entry-level tasks are automated.
- 2. Apprenticeship-Style Training.** Instead of “on-the-job” experience tied to low-level tasks, companies can establish apprenticeship models where junior employees shadow experienced mentors on live projects. This allows them to observe complex work up close and gradually take on real responsibilities.





STRATEGIES TO CREATE NEW SKILL PATHWAYS

#2 Blended Learning & Simulation

AI-Driven Training

Ironically, AI can help solve the gap it creates. AI simulations and virtual labs can approximate real-world scenarios, giving novices a taste of troubleshooting or document review tasks.

Certification & Micro-Credentials

More specialised skill sets may be delivered through structured learning, using platforms that provide bite-sized, verifiable credentials in areas like cybersecurity, analytics, or advanced software configuration.

Knowledge Sharing Communities

Team chat channels, internal wikis, and regular “lunch and learn” sessions can help new employees gain the cultural and historical context they’d otherwise accumulate in junior roles.



STRATEGIES TO CREATE NEW SKILL PATHWAYS

#3 Redefining Career Progression

- **Competency-Based Pathways.** Instead of relying on job titles (e.g. Level 1 Support), organisations can define career progression through skill mastery. Employees progress once they demonstrate competencies – through projects, assessments, or peer review – rather than simply ticking time-based boxes.
- **Continuous Upskilling.** Given the rapid evolution of AI, companies should encourage a culture of lifelong learning. Subsidised courses, conference attendance, and online platforms help maintain an agile, future-ready workforce.





Ecosystem Opinion



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As AI reshapes work, the transformation of entry-level roles risks disrupting talent development. Without proactive planning, organisations may face a hollowed-out talent pipeline, losing the foundational knowledge and fresh perspectives junior roles provide.

To counter this, enterprises must adopt strategies like rotational programs, mentorship, AI-driven simulations, and clear skill pathways to ensure early-career professionals develop into innovative, adaptable leaders.

Rather than rendering junior roles obsolete, AI calls for a more deliberate approach to skill-building – one that emphasises hands-on practice, guidance, and continuous learning from the start.

