

HFS RESEARCH FALL SUMMIT

THE SERVICES-AS-SOFTWARE ECONOMY: DISRUPT OR BE DISRUPTED

The Rise of the AI workers: What Happens When Work Decouples from Workers?

Dana Daher

Executive Research Leader, HFS Research

[Employment Law](#)

Salesforce Needs “Less Heads” due to AI, Axes 4,000 Customer Support Roles

BUSINESS / COMPANIES

SoftBank's Vision Fund mulls 20% job cuts after Son's pivot to AI

BUSINESS

Bosch Plans to Cut 13,000 Jobs Amid AI Push

The car-parts and technology company plans to reduce its workforce by thousands of workers in various stages by the end of 2030

Lufthansa under fire after airline says it is replacing thousands of human workers with AI

News

By [Craig Hale](#) published 15 hours ago

ChatGPT's Largest Enterprise User, PwC, Cuts Workforce By 1,500 Jobs

By [Chris Westfall](#), Contributor. © Guidance for leaders and aspiring leaders, in...

[Follow Author](#)

Published May 07, 2025, 11:00am EDT, Updated May 21, 2025, 08:40am EDT

Microsoft to cut up to 9,000 more jobs as it invests in AI

3 July 2025

Share  Save 

[Lily Jamali](#) North America Technology Correspondent , San Francisco

Accenture Cuts More Than 11,000 Jobs in Three Months; Announces AI-Driven Restructuring

Global IT giant trims workforce and shifts focus to artificial intelligence, with Pune operations also adapting to the transformation.

Amazon To Cut 1,000 Jobs Due To AI. Now What?

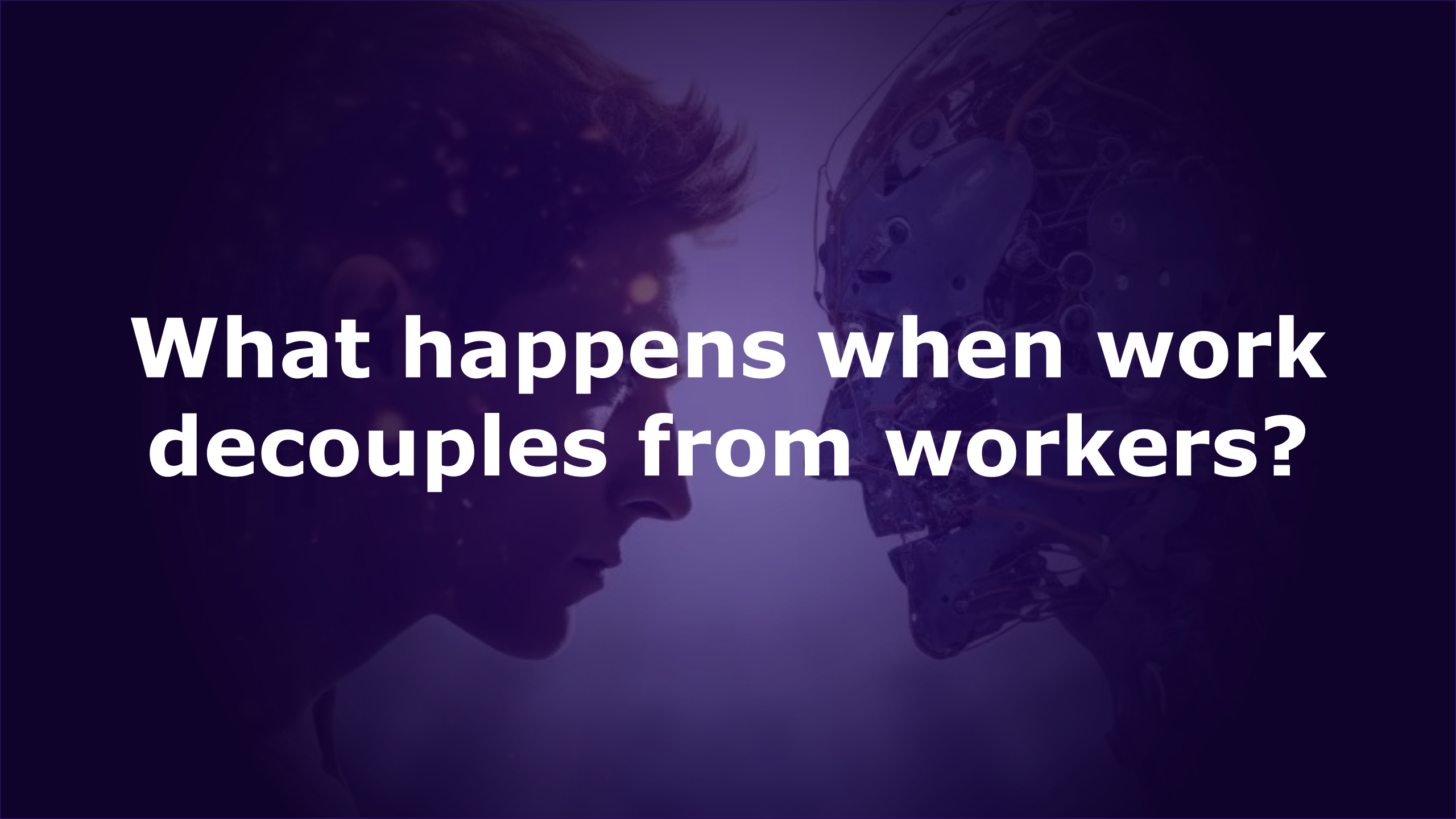
By [Eli Amdur](#), Contributor. © Leadership professor, job market journalist-...

▼

[Follow Author](#)

Published Jun 19, 2025, 03:04pm EDT

Online marketplace Fiverr to lay off 30% of workforce as it invests in AI

The background of the slide features two silhouettes facing each other. On the left is a human head in profile, facing right. On the right is a robotic head in profile, facing left. The robotic head is composed of various mechanical parts, including gears, wires, and a metallic shell. The entire scene is set against a dark purple gradient background.

**What happens when work
decouples from workers?**

**This isn't the first time it's
happened...**

When machines copied faster than scribes

15th century (Gutenberg, 1440s onward)

- In the 15th century, scribes controlled the world's knowledge
- 1440, Gutenberg's press arrived and shattered that monopoly.
- Suddenly, knowledge scaled faster than humans could keep up.
- That shift birthed new industries — publishing, literacy, education and a new information economy.



When machines spun faster than families

18th century (James Hargreaves, 1760s onward)

- In the 18th century, textile workers spun thread by hand
- In 1760, the Spinning Jenny was introduced
- Productivity soared, but so did fear.
- Riots broke out across England, factories replaced cottages, and “automation anxiety” was born.
- This upheaval laid the foundations for mass production, modern economy and social movements



When machines plowed faster than people

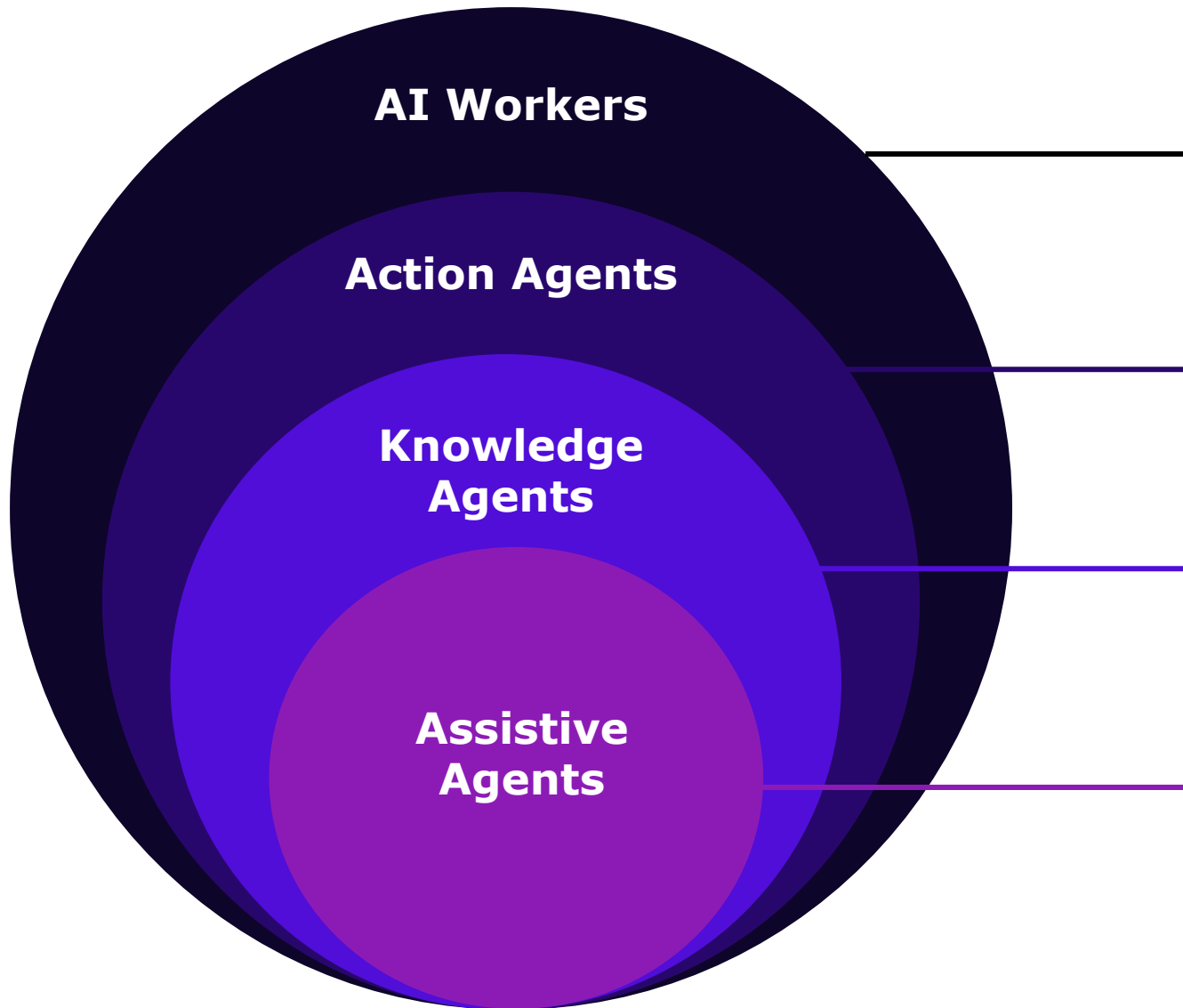
19th–20th century

- In the 1800s, half of U.S. workers farmed by hand.
- Then came reapers and tractors, replacing human labor.
- Productivity soared, but so did unrest — smashed machines, falling wages, rural anger.
- Millions left the fields for factories, fueling the industrial revolution.
- Work moved from muscle to machinery.



This is not just another efficiency revolution. Machines have replaced physical work before, but now they're replacing *cognitive work*.

The new hierarchy of cognitive decoupling of work



AI Workers – The handoff of accountability.

Full roles become autonomous. AI takes ownership of defined outcomes — recruiting, servicing, processing — while humans move toward governance and orchestration. *This is decoupling.*

Action Agents – The handoff of execution.

AI no longer just recommends; it acts. It runs claims, schedules, or approvals end-to-end. Humans step back to oversight and exception management. *This is automation.*

Knowledge Agents – The handoff of expertise.

AI starts to perform analytical cognition: pattern recognition, contextual comparison, and predictive reasoning. Humans shift from doing analysis to validation. *This is acceleration.*

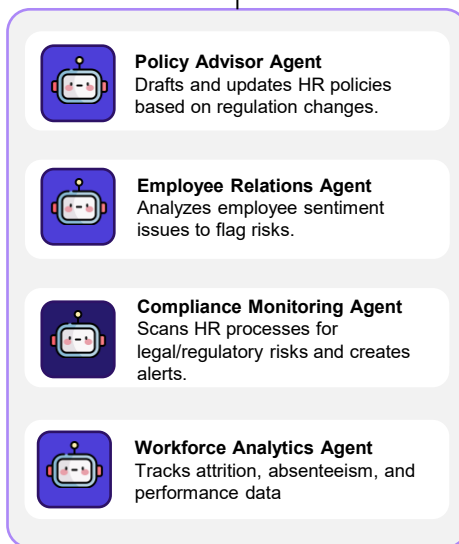
Assistive Agents – The first cognitive handoff.

AI that supports how we think. These are copilots that summarize, organize, and draft — speeding up human work but depending on our judgment and relationships. *This is augmentation.*

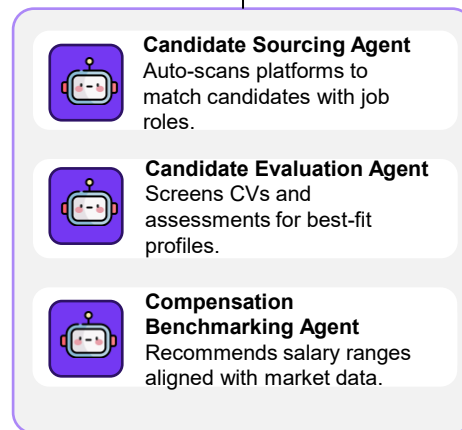
HR Leader



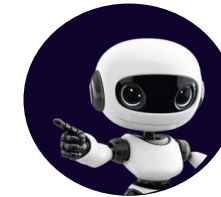
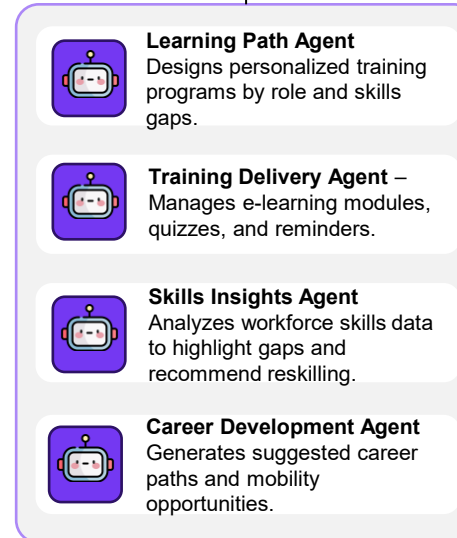
HR Business Partner



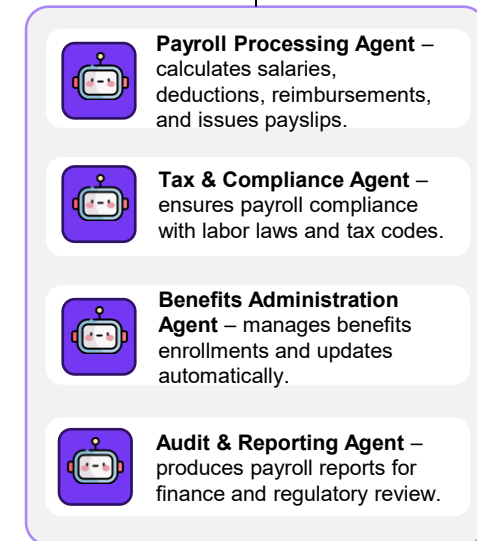
Recruiter



HR Generalist



Payroll Agent (AI workers)



We are already starting to see AI worker in the workforce



Customer Service AI worker @ a lending platform

Human equivalent: Call center agent handling loan queries

A lending platform handling 2 million tickets a year had overwhelmed call center staff struggling to keep up with customer queries.

An AI customer service worker stepped in to take on the repetitive work, verifying accounts, checking loan statuses, and resolving routine issues without escalation. By handling 80% of cases end-to-end, the AI lifted satisfaction from 40–50% to 75% and left human agents to focus only on the most complex customer needs.



HR AI worker @ a Tech services company

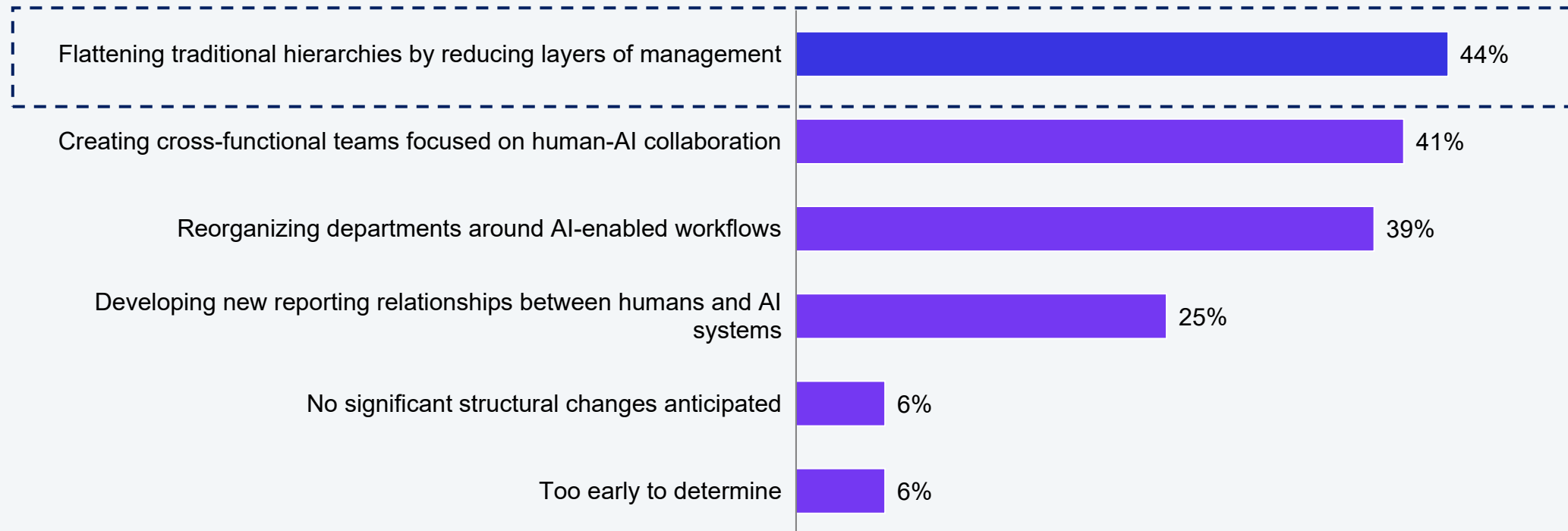
Human equivalent: HR staff fielding payroll and policy questions

At a large tech services company with 250,000 employees, HR teams were buried under payroll and benefits requests that often took days to resolve.

An AI HR employee became the universal front door, instantly fielding policy and payroll questions by drawing directly from HR systems and rules. The AI cut response times from days to seconds and allowed human HR staff to redirect their time toward strategy and employee experience.

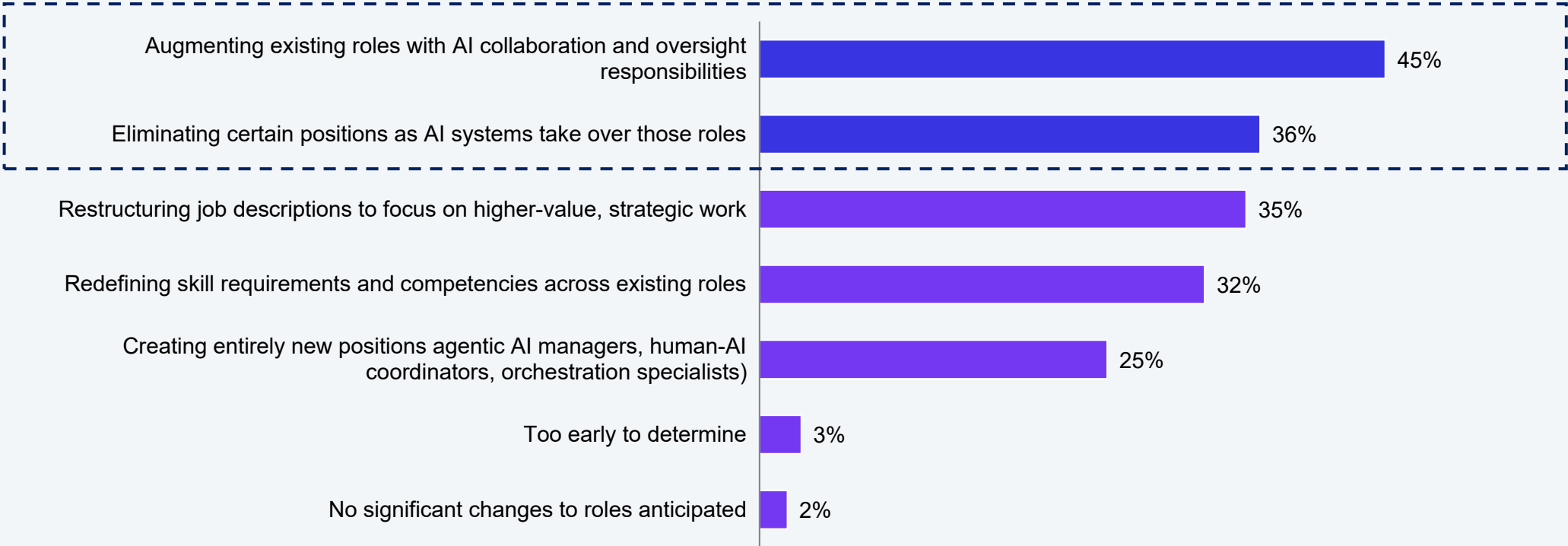
AI isn't just joining your team...it's redesigning it

What changes do you anticipate in organizational structure as agentic AI is implemented over the next 3 years?



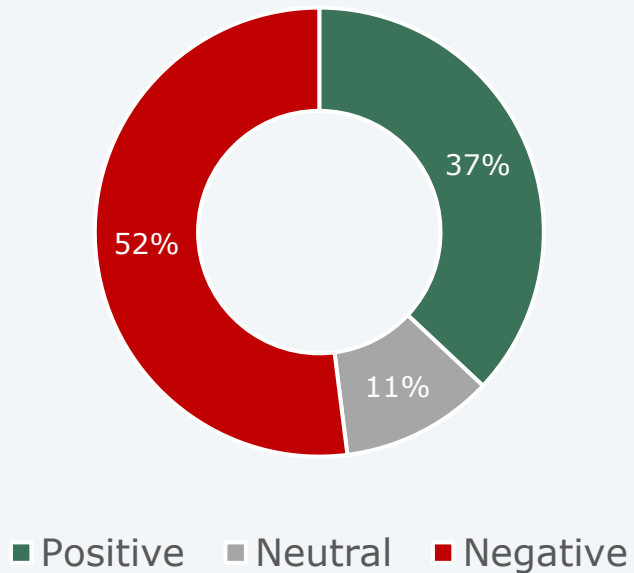
From job titles to joint systems, a role's definition is also shifting fast.

What changes do you anticipate in roles and positions as agentic AI is implemented over the next 3 years?

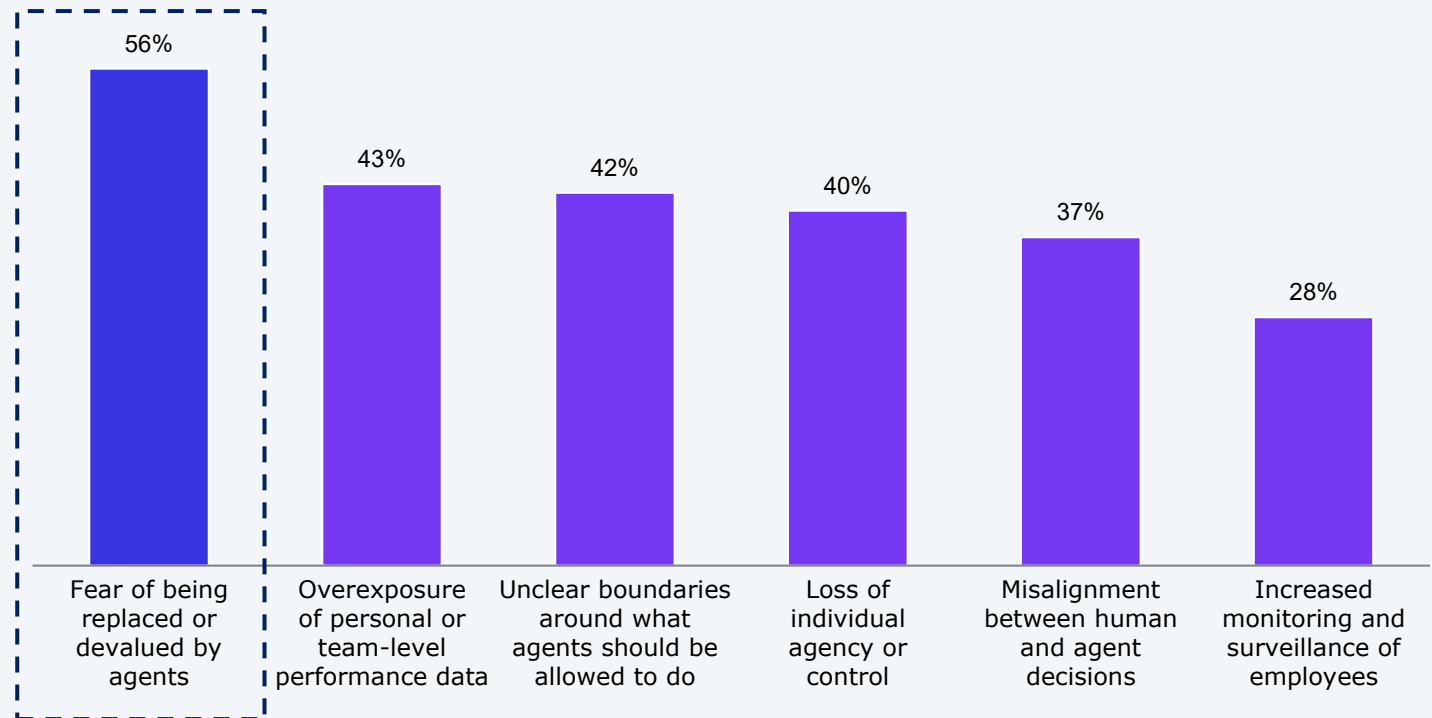


The human impact: value, fear, and identity

How are employees reacting to agent integration into workflows?



What workforce concerns are most top-of-mind as visibility into work patterns increases with agentic AI?



**History shows us fear and resistance
always come first — but adaptation
follows.**

The first step is knowing where to reskill, amplify, or replace.

	High cognitive complexity	Low cognitive complexity
Low Repeatability	Zone of Human Advantage Unique, creative, and judgment-heavy work. <i>E.g.</i>, CEOs, teachers, therapists, diplomats, and R&D scientists. Double down: invest in leadership, relationships, and creative problem-solving.	Zone of Emerging AI Collaboration Work where AI accelerates but humans must frame the context. <i>E.g.</i>, financial analysts, investigative journalists, medical diagnosticians, policy advisors. Build hybrid workflows: train for AI literacy, orchestration, and interpretation.
High Repeatability	Zone of Redesign Structured work with repeatable elements where AI automates routine and humans manage edge cases. <i>E.g.</i>, project managers, HR generalists, paralegals Redesign jobs: break work into tasks, automate what can be codified, reskill for oversight and judgment.	Zone of AI Substitution Codified, rule-based work that AI can do end-to-end. <i>E.g.</i>, call center reps, payroll clerks, data entry staff, schedulers. Exit or reskill: move people out of these roles before automation replaces them.

Cognitive complexity = how much thinking the work requires. (judgement, creativity, contextual understanding)

Repeatability = how similar the work is every time you do it.

Employees

- **Double down on what makes you human.**
- **Don't wait for training, get AI-literate now.**
- **Shift your mindset from replacement to redesign**
- **Make curiosity your edge.**

Employers

- **Stop using AI as a blunt instrument for headcount reduction.**
- **Redesign jobs, don't just automate tasks**
- **Invest in reskilling as aggressively as you invest in AI**
- **Build trust into adoption.**

What happens when work decouples from workers?

The same thing happens in every revolution: work changes, workers change, and society must change with it.

The only difference this time is that we have the chance to design it with intention.

HFS

Thank you.

THE
**SERVICES-AS-SOFTWARE
ECONOMY: DISRUPT OR BE
DISRUPTED**



www.hfsresearch.com



[hfsresearch](https://www.linkedin.com/company/hfsresearch)



www.horsesforsources.com



www.horsesmouthpodcast.com