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# TRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK IN AN AI WORLD

Foresight Report by **FutureStation.ro**

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→ What actions could enable preferred futures?


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## WHY EXPLORING THE FUTURE?

The labor market is fluctuating more than ever due to social, economic, demographic and technological changes. As a result, how people see work today is different than it was few years ago. In particular, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is having its moments in the workplace, shaping the way we work and interact.

In this context, traditional strategic planning methods, which often rely on extrapolating the past and the present, prove to be inadequate. Such linear approaches often fail to account for the opportunities and challenges introduced by AI, leaving employers vulnerable to unforeseen shocks and limiting their capacity for effective response to changes.

**Futures thinking and foresight offer tools to help societies, businesses, and policymakers navigate the uncertainty brought about by automation and AI.**

Methodologies such as horizon scanning, trends analysis, scenario planning helps employers prepare for and anticipate change rather than only react to it. They allow us to ask: What kind of future do we want? If AI is blended into every aspect of work, what does it mean to be a skilled worker, a competent professional, or a leader?

With this report, we want to spark conversation and ideas about how we can ensure Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is a winner and remains competitive in a world shaped by AI. We are not saying it is going to be easy, keeping the pace with AI asks for digital literacy, an area where both Romania and Hungary still face significant gaps.

> The future is not something we just enter — it's something we imagine, we challenge and we co-create. **And that gives us power.**"
>
> **DIANA STAFIE**, Founder of Future Station

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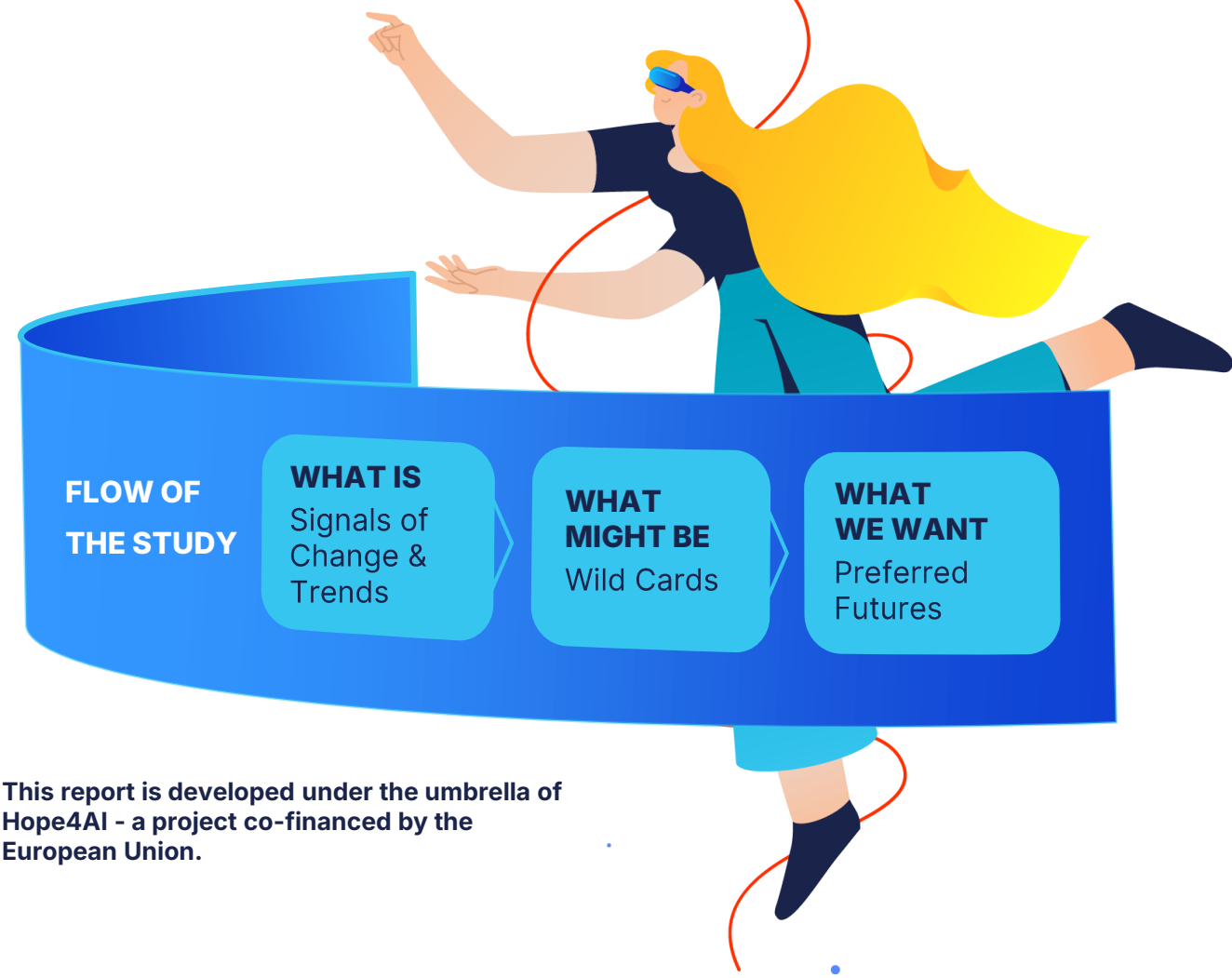
## Will AI help us perform better?

## Can we experiment with new models of employment that are more resilient and future-fit in an AI world?

These are not just theoretical questions, they demand practical answers, collective imagination, and coordinated conversations and strategies. This report seeks to open up that dialogue.

We have strong reasons to be optimistic about the future, a future where work and AI blend harmoniously, where technology improves rather than replaces human interaction. But these positive scenarios will not unfold by default. They will require bold ideas, shared responsibility, and above all, collaboration.



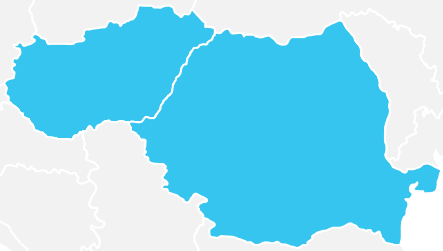

**This report is developed under the umbrella of Hope4AI - a project co-financed by the European Union.**

# COUNTRY PROFILES

## RO Romania

Romania's National AI Strategy (2024–2027) was approved in July 2024 and outlines the country's ambition to align with the EU's digital and AI objectives. **The strategy focuses on five pillars: digital public administration, digital economy, digital education, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies.**

Despite policy efforts, AI adoption remains low: just **3.1% of Romanian companies used AI in 2024**, versus the EU average of 13.5%. This gap is largely due to structural challenges such as limited investment, institutional capacity, and talent readiness.



Two recent initiatives signal potential ecosystem growth:

**HRIA – Romanian AI Hub:** A €65M national research and innovation project led by Politehnica Bucharest, uniting academia and SMEs for AI solutions in sectors like law, finance, health, and cities.

**FreeYa Mind Campus:** A deep tech and quantum innovation hub in Iași, developed with IBM, set to be Romania's first IBM Quantum Innovation Center by 2026.

However, Romania still ranks low on basic digital capabilities: only **27.8% of the population had basic digital skills in 2024** (EU average: 55.5%).

Just **51% of Romanian workers** say they have used Generative AI at work at least once in the past 12 months, and only 5% use it daily.

## HU Hungary

Hungary's National AI Strategy (2020–2030) aims to position the country as a regional AI leader. The plan prioritizes productivity, innovation, and digital transformation through public-private initiatives.

One standout project:

**Miskolc AI Pilot Project:** Launched in April 2025, it applies AI in local governance, tourism, and education.

Hungary shows increasing AI activity in startups: in **2024**, **36% of Hungarian startups have built AI products** (up from 26% in 2023). Areas of focus include robotics and biotech. Despite a dip in AI funding in 2024, 68% of employees report they're equipped to use AI at work, and 47% of them are using it for fact-finding, translation (46%) and skills development (42%).

## AI & THE WORKFORCE

According to Special Eurobarometer 554 – AI and the Future of Work (2024):

**61%Ro & 64%Hu** believe digital technologies, including AI, have a positive **impact** in their current job.

**7%Ro & 8%Hu** view the use of AI and robots in the workplace as very positive. **53% of Hungarian and 48% of Romanian workers view them as fairly positive.**

**61%Ro & 62%Hu** feel they have the **skills** to use the latest digital technologies to do their job.

**58%Ro & 68%Hu** say their employer provides tools or **training** for AI/digital tools.

**In Romania**

AI is most used for enforcing **safety measures.**

**In Hungary**

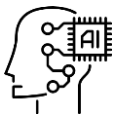
AI is used mainly for managing **worktime schedules.**

**In Both Countries**

AI is least used for hiring.


“
THE FUTURE
IS ALREADY HERE...
JUST NOT EVENLY
DISTRIBUTED”
W. GIBSON

# TRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK IN AN AI WORLD

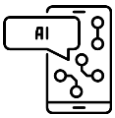



TREND 1.

## Human Augmentation

TREND 2.

## Algorithmic Management & Control




TREND 3.

## Fractional Work


TREND 4.

## Shape-Shifting (Work) Structures

TREND 5.

## Blended Realities

TREND 6.

## Green-Collar Work & Skills

**TO DO**

After reviewing each of the six trends, explore the 'Trend Canvas' provided. Select top (3) trends most relevant to your context and analyze their implications using the canvas structure.

# WHAT IS CHANGING?

The way we work is being reshaped in real time — not just by new tools, but by new expectations, structures, and relationships. It's not just about *where* or *when* we work anymore, but *how* work is defined, who participates, and what value looks like in a world increasingly shaped by AI.

**Will automation eliminate jobs or unlock new forms of human potential?**

**Will AI systems reduce bias or reinforce it?**

**And how do we prepare for a labour market that's in motion, but not following a single path?**

To explore these questions, we've identified **six emerging trends shaping the future of work in an AI-driven world**:

Let's start with **Human Augmentation**, where AI copilots, wearable robotics, and digital assistants are reshaping what it means to "work." But these tools do more than help — they also **manage, assess, and allocate**.

This leads us directly into **Algorithmic Management & Control**, where machines **aren't just supporting decisions** — they're making them. In this context, **Fractional Work** is gaining ground: professionals are no longer tied to a single employer or rigid role but **move between** projects and platforms, often co-managed by algorithms.

As organizations adapt, their structures must change too. We're seeing the rise of **Shape-Shifting Work Structures** — fluid, **decentralized** models enabled by technology, where leadership is distributed and roles are modular.

These new environments increasingly blend the physical and digital, with **Blended Realities** making training, collaboration, and onboarding more immersive and scalable. And while much of the conversation centers on automation and technology, one shift reminds us that the future of work is also **about impact and stewardship.**

The rise of **Green-Collar Work & Skills** marks a deeper transformation: jobs are no longer only about productivity, but also about impact.

As AI accelerates energy efficiency and circular logistics, we see a growing demand for workers who can think green and act digital. In this future, **climate literacy becomes as essential as data literacy.**

| TREND | STEEP Category | Key Aspects |
|---|---|---|
| Human Augmentation | Social<br>Technological | AI Copilots, Wearable Robotics, From HR To HCR, Augmented Leadership |
| Algorithmic Management & Control | Political (Regulations) / Technologic | Platform Governance, Task Allocation, Black-box Systems, Fairness Concerns, Regulations |
| Fractional Work | Economic<br>Social | Gig Work, Multiple Income Streams, Solopreneurs, AI Agents, Fractional Executives |
| Shape-Shifting (Work) Structures | Technological<br>Economic | DAOs, Modular Teams, Distributed Leadership, Democratized Intelligence, New Business Models |
| Blended Realities | Technological | VR/AR Workspaces, Simulation Skills, Spatial Computing, Gamification |
| Green-Collar Work & Skills | Environmental | Green Jobs, ESG Metrics, AI For Sustainability, Digital + Green Fluency |

**These trends should be analyzed in conjunction with other relevant developments, such as an aging society or Glass Box cultures.**

**We recommend maintaining a dynamic internal trend radar within your organization, mapping all STEEP factors and positioning them across multiple time horizons (1–3 years, 3–5 years, and 5–10 years).**

**This structured approach helps ensure you're not overlooking important signals of change in any area of society.**

## What is STEEP?

STEEP is a strategic foresight framework used to scan and categorize external forces that could impact your organization or industry. The acronym stands for:

- → **S – Social:** shifts in demographics, lifestyles, values, or behaviors (e.g. aging populations, migration, changing work-life expectations)
- → **T – Technological:** emerging technologies, automation, AI, digital infrastructure
- → **E – Economic:** market trends, inflation, labor shifts, income levels, new business models
- → **E – Environmental:** climate change, resource constraints, sustainability regulations
- → **P – Political:** public policy, governance, geopolitical dynamics, regulation.

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TREND 1

# Human Augmentation

## Human augmentation refers to the use of technology to extend or enhance our physical, cognitive, and sensory abilities.

As automation grows more intelligent, enhancing human capabilities with technology could be the new way for businesses to stay competitive.
An extension of this trend could be seen in the HR department, where the HR might transform into HCR / HMR (Human–Computer Resources or Human-Machine Resources), where managers manage both people and machines / computers. This trend illustrates how the work evolves into a space where humans and algorithms co-create.

Since the beginning of humanity, we have been driven by a desire to do more and to expand our capabilities. We have found ways to go farther, faster, and higher. For example, arrows helped us procure food, or glasses help us see better and protect us from the sun. These are all ways we have used tools and technology to make ourselves perform better. What's different now is the **speed and depth** of the integration between humans and machines.

Modern human augmentation, particularly in the context of work shaped by AI, is less about physically merging with machines, but more about using technology, especially AI as a co-pilot, to amplify human capabilities. On the other hand, just like other recent advances in automation and AI technologies, the rise of Generative AI has led to concerns about possible job displacement. While a wide range of tasks may be fully automated by AI, research to date has found very few examples of jobs that could be displaced in this way in their entirety. Instead, there is more research and more signals from the future, where AI can become our extension, and augment our capabilities.

**AI has created more jobs than it has displaced:**

According to the WEF's Future of Jobs Report 2025, AI is expected to displace approximately 85 million jobs globally by 2025, but at the same time, **97 million new jobs are projected to be created**, resulting in a net gain of 12 million jobs.

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Currently, **80% of the global workforce reports a lack of time and energy to complete their work**, highlighting the need for augmentation.

**The adoption gap**: 3 times more employees are using Generative AI than their leaders think — and over 70% expect Generative AI will reshape 30% or more of their job by 2027.

81% of leaders expect AI agents to be moderately or extensively integrated into their company's AI strategy within the next 12–18 months.

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**By 2050, there could be one billion humanoid robots in use worldwide**, generating revenues of up to $5 trillion. The majority of these robots are expected to be used in commercial sectors such as logistics, retail, manufacturing, and various services. Additionally, robots could be found in tourism and hospitality, performing tasks like cleaning, maintenance, and check-in. China currently leads both in the production and adoption of humanoid robots, followed by the United States.

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# WHAT WE SEE ALREADY HAPPENING

## RO Romania

- Up to 54% of jobs in Romania-approximately 4.2 million roles-are likely to be augmented by generative AI in the coming years. This augmentation typically involves automating a subset of tasks, supporting content creation (text, code, images), aiding in complex problem-solving, and contributing to product design.
- Moreover, in **Romania's public sector**, 69% of jobs could be complemented by generative AI, primarily by automating routine tasks (e.g., data entry, report generation, document analysis) and freeing up time for higher-value activities. However, only 23% of public institutions have invested in AI solutions, even though 54% of public administration employees report using AI tools by their own.

## HU Hungary

- Focusing our attention on Hungary, we find out about, Proofminder, an AgTech platform that places a virtual "agronomist" next to every plant, offering continuous crop monitoring to enhance decision-making and farming efficiency.
- Surprisingly or not, according to research by Kaspersky, **46% of Romanians** and **44% of Hungarians** are open to human augmentation.

## Global Signals of Change

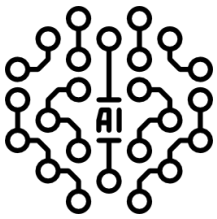
- **Voice AI recruiters:** In 2025, Mochi (by Maki) launched a voice AI agent that interviews, scores, and routes top talent in minutes.
- **Retail chatbots:** Target is rolling out Store Companion, an AI chatbot guiding nearly 2,000 store teams through daily tasks and troubleshooting.
- **Robot teammates:** Hyundai and Kia's X-ble Shoulder helps factory workers — especially older ones — with overhead physical tasks.
- **AI-powered CEOs:** NetDragon Websoft appointed Tang Yu, an AI CEO. Under her leadership, the stock outperformed the Hang Seng Index.
- **Embedded AI in HR:** Workable automates hiring, from salary suggestions to interview kits and candidate matching.
- **Agentic AI:** Humans.ai builds trustworthy AI agents that manage sensitive workflows through biometric approval and transparency layers.
- **AI influencer:** GIA, launched by Garanti BBVA, is Romania's first AI finfluencer — offering personalized financial insights with a human-like voice.

# IMPACT OF AI ON KNOWLEDGE WORK

**The impact of AI on knowledge-intensive professions (strategy, research, market analysis, etc.) is being reshaped by AI's capacity to generate, synthesise, and even interpret vast sets of data. But while AI systems are becoming more agentic, human oversight remains important to make sure the outcome is still meaningful and relevant.**

## AGENCY OF AI

**Agency** refers to the capacity of an entity to act independently, make choices, and influence outcomes based on its own intentions or goals. In humans, agency involves decision-making, intentionality, self-reflection, and the ability to take responsibility for one's actions. **When we talk about agency in AI, we're referring to an artificial system's ability to:**




**PERCEIVE**
its environment (via data inputs)

**EVALUATE**
options or scenarios (using algorithms)

**MAKE DECISIONS**
autonomously (based on its programming code)

**Traditional software systems required human operators to frame and solve problems. Today's AI agents, however, can act with a degree of independence, working alongside humans.**

This evolution shifts the human role from:

CONTROLLERS → **CO-PILOTS**
// overseeing but not micromanaging AI decisions.

TASK EXECUTORS → **INTERPRETERS**
// evaluating AI output and embedding it in meaningful contexts.

DESIGNERS OF TOOLS → **DESIGNERS OF COLLABORATIVE SYSTEMS**
// shaping environments where humans and machines work in tandem.

**As AI evolves, we should rethink some ideas about knowledge, agency, and exploration.**

### What role does human agency have in the era of autonomous agents?

Humans design, guide, and give meaning to what AI agents do. Even if AI can act on its own, it needs humans to set the goals, provide context, and decide what's important. The best results come when humans and AI work together as **co-pilots.**

### Could curiosity be the engine that drives agentic AI?

Yes, but, while AI is not curios in the same way we as humans are, **it can simulate curiosity.** In this case, we are referring to reinforcement learning. In reinforcement learning, "curiosity" is often designed as an intrinsic reward mechanism. Instead of only rewarding the AI for achieving a specific goal (like winning a game), it also gets a reward for exploring novel states or discovering new information. However, human guidance is needed to make sure AI focuses on questions and problems that matter to us.

## Who is using AI at work? Nearly everyone. But how?

Right now, most work is still done by people, but technology is catching up. According to the **World Economic Forum**, within the next few years, employers anticipate that work will be shared more equally between humans and machines. This shift means more jobs will involve people working alongside technology, rather than people or machines working alone.

Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the **two types of human augmentation**. Each opens up very different opportunities (and questions) for the future of work.

### COGNITIVE AUGMENTATION

**Enhancing the mind:** thinking, reasoning, remembering, and creating

Cognitive augmentation refers to using AI to extend or amplify our mental abilities. It implies working with tools, such as Generative AI, that help us perform better, faster or express ourselves more creatively.

**How is this future unfolding?**

- → At the end of last year, Microsoft Copilot had **28 million active users**.
- → 69% of developers have tried, and **49% regularly use ChatGPT** for coding and other development-related activities.
- → According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025, **employers expecting to be impacted by ageing populations** are more likely to accelerate automation (73%) and deploy workforce augmentation (63%) in the next five years.
- → According to a survey from McKinsey, **94% of employees and 99% of C-suite leaders report having some level of familiarity with Generative AI tools**.

**Questions:**

- Could cognitive augmentation increase inequality between those with access and those without?
- Are we outsourcing too much thinking to machines?
- Who is responsible for a decision made with AI's help?

### PHYSICAL (AND SENSORY) AUGMENTATION

**Enhancing the body:** strength, endurance, precision, and perception

Physical augmentation means using technology to improve our physical capabilities, become stronger, and protect us from dangerous tasks. In this case, technology enhances people's safety and well-being.

**How is this future unfolding?**

- → **Apogee ULTRA** is the world's most powerful commercial exoskeleton now. It provides up to 36 kilograms of weight compensation per lift.
- → **DHL** is using **AR glasses** to guide warehouse employees through logistics tasks. The AR glasses display real-time instructions, item locations, and optimised navigation routes directly in the workers' field of view.
- → **Brain-computer interfaces (BCIs)** are helping medical professionals and engineers interact with machines using brain signals, especially in high-stakes environments like neurosurgery or heavy industry.

**Questions:**

- Will workers be expected to do more in other tasks to compensate for what AI is doing?
- Could physical augmentation become a condition for employment in certain sectors?

# GENERATIVE. AGENT. AGENTIC. WHAT SETS THEM APART?

To understand how AI is evolving from a tool to a collaborator, here's a comparison of Generative AI, AI Agents, and Agentic AI.

| GENERATIVE AI | AI AGENTS | AGENTIC AI |
|---|---|---|
| **WHAT IT IS**<br>**A model that generates content from prompts** | **WHAT IT IS**<br>A system that takes a goal and uses tools to complete it | **WHAT IT IS**<br>A multi-agent system with a huge that plans, coordinates, and adapts to meet complex objectives |
| **HOW IT WORKS**<br>**One-shot: User gives input → AI returns output** | **HOW IT WORKS**<br>Goal → Agent → Uses tools → Returns final result | **HOW IT WORKS**<br>Objective → Multiple sub-agents plan + execute using tools & memory |
| **EXAMPLES**<br>**ChatGPT, DALL·E, Claude, Mid Journey, Gemini** | **EXAMPLES**<br>LangChain agents, Alexa, Google Assistant (as single agent) | **EXAMPLES**<br>AutoGPT, Devin (as planner + executor), Cognosys, Superagent |
| **WHAT IT CAN DO**<br>**Write stories, generate images, answer questions, translate** | **WHAT IT CAN DO**<br>Research, automate workflows, fill forms, generate structured outputs | **WHAT IT CAN DO**<br>Manage projects, reason over time, adapt plans, self-evolve tasks |
| **LIMITATIONS**<br>**Limited memory, limited planning, cannot use tools** | **LIMITATIONS**<br>Limited memory, mostly sequential logic, tool usage is predefined | **LIMITATIONS**<br>Complex to build, high resource demands, still in early stages |
| **METAPHOR**<br>**A skilled writer taking instructions** | **METAPHOR**<br>An intern completing tasks with apps/tools | **METAPHOR**<br>A project manager with a smart team and shared memory |

# HOW EXPENSIVE IS IT TO HAVE YOUR OWN AI AGENT?

## Not as much as you think.

AI used to be the domain of tech giants, with billion-dollar budgets and massive cloud infrastructure. That's no longer the case.

Today, thanks to open-source models and tools, anyone can build or use their own AI agent — often **without spending more than $100** for basic use. You can run lightweight models on personal laptops or even devices like the **Raspberry Pi**.

**AI is no longer just for Big Tech companies. It's a tool anyone can build with — starting now.**

### What changed?

- **Open-source AI:** Powerful models now available for free.
- **Smaller, smarter tools:** You don't need a data center — just a decent PC.
- **More imagination than money:** The main challenge today is vision, not budget.

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TREND 2

# Algorithmic Management & Control

**This trend is about how work is organized, supervised, and evaluated in the future and how algorithms impact the labor market.**

What is changing is *how* and *why* decisions regarding employees are taken. Instead of being guided by human judgment and interpersonal relationships, we observe business decisions that are the result of automated processes and algorithmic logic. Traditional workplace hierarchies are being reshaped or even replaced by invisible layers of technology that monitor, analyse, and control employees' behaviour. Another effect of this shift might be the depersonalization of management, creating the feelings among workers of being managed by a "faceless system".

The workplace becomes more data-centric, where feedback is instant but impersonal, and where trust must be placed not only in people but also in systems.

- Managers in "white collar" sectors (e.g. finance and insurance, public administration) are more likely to say that their organisations use algorithmic management tools compared to those in "blue collar" sectors.
- High cost is the leading reason for non-adoption of algorithmic management tools, followed by staff resistance.
- **45% of managers perceive that algorithmic management software improves their job satisfaction**, and 52% report increased decision quality.
- **OECD - Algorithmic management in the workplace**: New evidence from an OECD employer survey (2025).

**What's emerging is a duality:** algorithmic management is both a powerful tool for operational control and a potential source of worker disempowerment. It creates new efficiencies and promises to reduce human bias, but it can also perpetuate biases, undermine trust, dignity, and psychological safety at work.

For employers, the challenge is to deploy these technologies responsibly, making sure that human values are embedded in machine logic, and that transparency, fairness, and accountability remain at the core of workplace decision-making.

**Looking ahead**, we may witness a fragmentation of the labour market. In some sectors, human-centered leadership will persist, focusing on collaboration, empathy, and mutual trust. In others, particularly where work is routine or transactional, algorithmic management may dominate, turning workers into nodes in a digital system governed by metrics, rankings, and real-time surveillance.

**The future of work, in this sense, depends not only on what technology can do, but on how we choose to design and govern it.**

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# WHAT WE SEE ALREADY HAPPENING

**Real-world signals of algorithmic control — and resistance.**

## Algorithms Managing Workers

- **Bosch Hungary:** Nearly half of factories use AI to oversee output and performance — replacing traditional supervisors.
- **Meituan (China):** Couriers are auto-prompted to rest after 8 hours by an "anti-fatigue" algorithm.
- **Target (US):** Retail workers get real-time instructions from a Generative AI chatbot called Store Companion.
- **BMW Romania:** AI helps streamline supply chain tasks like demand forecasting and inventory control.
- **Maersk + Romanian start-up:** Warehouse robots use digital twins to manage workflows and optimize planning.

## When the Algorithm Gets It Wrong

- **Air Canada:** Ordered to honour a refund its chatbot invented — showing the risks of unsupervised AI.
- **Uber:** Driver fired by algorithm — no explanation, no appeal.
- **UnitedHealth & others:** U.S. insurers sued for denying claims using "nH Predict" — 90% of rejections overturned.
- **Food delivery (UK):** Workers face opaque rules, black-box evaluations, and automated account bans.

## What do regulators do?

- **EU Platform Work Directive (2024):** Requires platforms to explain how workers are ranked, rated, and assigned tasks.
- **Romanian AI Law (2025, draft):** Would ban purely automated decisions without human review.

TREND 3

# Fractional Work

**The traditional idea of a full-time, 9-to-5 job with one employer might not be the only option in the future.**

As technology changes how work is organized, more people are choosing to work on multiple projects, gigs, or short-term roles, often for different companies at once. Flexibility, autonomy, and variety may become more important than stability alone.

Today, fractional roles are growing — including at the top.

**From linear careers to portfolio careers, a new professional logic is taking shape.**

It's becoming difficult to follow a linear, one-employer career path. Instead, a new model is emerging — **portfolio careers**. Professionals now combine multiple roles, gigs, or income streams, operating more as **micro-enterprises** than traditional employees.

With the support of AI tools and digital platforms, they're scaling their work, and building "**personal economies**" that mix consulting, creative work, freelance projects, and even digital products. **Career adaptability** and self-management become core skills — and the boundary between "employee" and "entrepreneur" starts to blur.

Fractional Executives are senior professionals — such as CFOs, CMOs, or COOs — who work with multiple organizations at once, on a part-time, project-based, or time-limited basis.

They're brought in to lead specific initiatives or for their guidance without being hired as full-time employees.

**Think of them as "leaders on demand." They roll up their sleeves and work alongside teams, without the overhead of a permanent contract**

Unlike advisors, they take responsibility for implementing strategies.

Unlike consultants, they work with internal teams.

And unlike interims, their role isn't to temporarily fill a vacancy, but to drive a strategic lasting change.

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# WHAT WE SEE ALREADY HAPPENING

**Several emerging platforms and services (including those from Hungary and Romania) are enabling the shift toward more flexible, on-demand work models.**

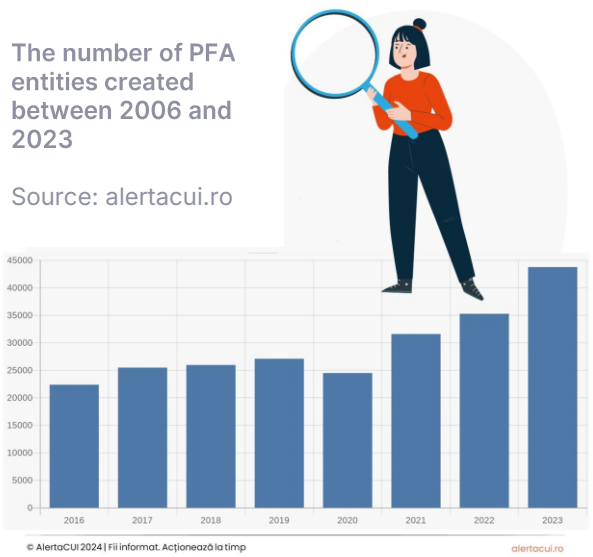
**These examples show how the infrastructure for fractional work and personal economies is already forming:**

## Platforms enabling fractional work

- RO **Inctrl.ai:** A Romanian-based platform matching IT freelancers with flexible projects. Supports fractional work via AI-driven matching for better fit and collaboration.
- RO **Capital Decisions:** Specialized in providing Fractional CFO services to SMEs — a growing local signal of demand for modular financial leadership.
- **AboveBoard:** A global platform connecting companies with senior-level talent for part-time or project-based roles.
- **Paro.io:** Offers on-demand access to finance professionals (CFOs, controllers, FP&A).

## Local and regional signals

- **~300 professionals in Romania** list "fractional executive" in their LinkedIn title (as of April 2025).
- **60% of employees in Romania** say flexibility is a key factor in job selection (BestJobs, 2024).
- **1 in 4 professionals in Europe** now work part-time, project-based, or in fractional roles (Eurostat). However, CEE countries show lower flexibility in labour markets compared to EU average, especially in contract types and job mobility (Eurostat, 2024).
- **Steady growth in self-employment** and PFA registrations in Romania (AlertaCUI, 2025).




The number of PFA entities created between 2006 and 2023

Source: alertacui.ro

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TREND 4

# Shape-Shifting (Work) Structures

**We're seeing a shift away from rigid hierarchies toward more fluid, decentralized ways of working.**

Organizations become modular and adaptive, supported by AI, Decentralized Autonomous Organizations - DAOs, and decentralized leadership. Is a shift from elite-centric cognitive scarcity to collective cognitive abundance, empowering diverse minds over reliance on a select few "smart leaders."

New technologies, but especially AI, are making it easier for people to work across multiple projects, form temporary teams, and share leadership.

It's no longer just about *who* leads, but how leadership is exercised. Employees don't wait for direction — they contribute, vote, coordinate, and iterate, supported by digital systems that handle coordination, decisions, and even optimization.

**This trend decentralizes both intelligence and decision-making. In some cases, AI is even stepping into leadership roles.**

**57 %** **of employees believe AI is fairer than humans:** 23% are more comfortable owning a mistake if it's being reported to a machine rather than a human.

## DAO – An emerging Organisational (Work) Structure

Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) represent a new model for organizing work and collaboration. Built on blockchain, DAOs use smart contracts to automate operations and replace traditional hierarchies with collective decision-making, typically through token-based voting.

Advocates argue that DAOs enable faster innovation and stronger alignment through shared ownership.

Some organizations are exploring DAO structures to engage communities more directly, especially in product development and the creator economy. While still evolving, DAOs challenge conventional ideas of how organizations form, operate, and create value.

DeepDAO is a platform that tracks DAOs and their governance activity. As of June 2025, it aggregates data from over 50,000 governance structures, with a combined treasury exceeding $16.2 billion USD.

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# WHAT WE SEE ALREADY HAPPENING

## RO Romania

→ **ETH Bucharest:** ETH Bucharest was the first event in 2024 where Arbitrum DAO - a major international decentralised autonomous organisation- was present.

## HU Hungary

→ **Polkadot DAO:** A Hungarian decentralized organization with a multi-signature governance system and published "Zero to DAO" guidelines to grow the local DAO ecosystem.

## Global Signals of Change

→ **Dictador & NetDragon:** Companies that appointed AI entities ("Mika" and "Tang Yu") as CEOs or Board Members.

→ **Uniswap:** Uniswap is one of the biggest and most popular DAOs. Anyone can participate in Uniswap governance by holding UNI tokens. These tokens grant voting rights on proposals that determine how the protocol is run and administered.

→ **1,000 autonomous AI agents collaborate to build their own society:** Autonomous AI agents in synthetic environments (e.g., in Minecraft by Altera & MIT) are starting to develop their own economic structures, showing early models of self-organizing digital societies.

→ **Marketing agency transitions to employee ownership model:** In November 2024, the London-based marketing agency Brandnation transitioned to an employee-owned structure. The new organisational structure is meant to reflect Brandnation's focus on empowering staff and fostering long-term stability.

## Can you run a company as a perfect free market?

**Disco Corp**, a Tokyo-based semiconductor equipment manufacturer founded in 1937, has run an internal economy since 2011 using **an internal system called Will**. In this model, employees:

→ Choose tasks freely—no bosses assigning work
→ Earn "Will" tokens for completed tasks and are fined for mistakes
→ Use token balances to influence bonuses and responsibilities.

The Financial Times calls it "a radical experiment" where internal markets operate on an app, "mimicking free-market principles".

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TREND 5

# Blended realities

**Wearing a screen on your face might once have seemed like something only gamers or tech enthusiasts would enjoy. But today, headsets and other devices that enable virtual or augmented reality experiences are being used beyond stores or gaming centers.**

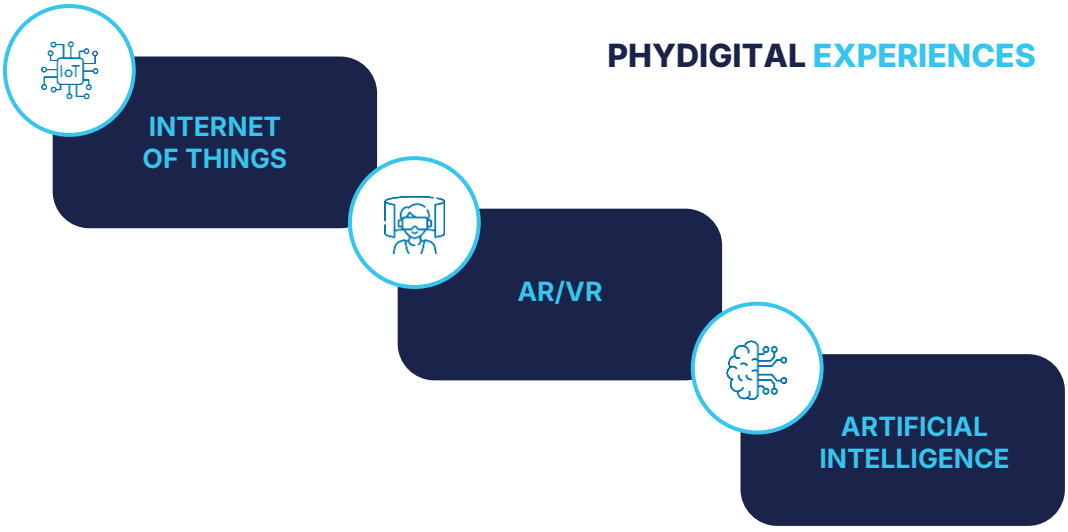
Companies across diverse industries are now testing and deploying AR/VR technologies in a wide range of work-related applications.

This trend—driven by technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and the metaverse—signals the rise of a **phygital (physical + digital)** workspace.

It's a future where collaboration doesn't require people to be in the same room, city, or even country. Teams can meet, learn, and co-create in immersive 3D environments that feel more real and engaging than a standard video call.

But it's not just about technology, it's also about emotion and human connection. People still want presence, even when apart. Blended realities can create a sense of presence and shared purpose that feels closer to being there. Therefore, what used to be a physical and co-located space, is now algorithmic and mediated by AI.

**Blended realities could become the default mode of interaction**—especially for younger generations. As devices, sensors, and AI become more powerful and invisible, the boundaries between offline and online will continue to fade.



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# WHAT WE SEE ALREADY HAPPENING

## Global Signals of Change

- **Romania's first Spatial AI Center:** launched by EON Reality in early 2024, offers 10,000+ AI-enhanced learning experiences customized to Romanian workforce needs—including in Advanced Manufacturing, AI & Machine Learning, and Cybersecurity.
- **AI societies in Minecraft:** The startup **Altera**, co-founded by a former MIT professor, released over 1,000 autonomous AI agents into a Minecraft world. Without any human input, these agents create jobs, vote, and even share memes.
- **IKEA in Roblox:** **IKEA** announced that it's hiring real employees to work in its new Roblox store—an immersive game-like environment. Hires are paid £13.15/hour, the same rate as physical co-workers in London.
- **VR for workforce training:** From hardware maintenance to empathy-building, companies use VR to simulate real-world decisions. **Walmart**, for instance, uses VR from **Strivr** to train employees on customer service, safety protocols, and error detection in stores.

| TRADITIONAL WORK | BLENDED REALITIES WORK |
|---|---|
| **WORK ROUTINE**<br>→ Goes to the office in the morning<br>→ Uses standard tools (e.g., Excel, email)<br>→ Face-to-face meetings and casual chats<br>→ Leaves office at end of day | **WORK ROUTINE**<br>→ Works from anywhere (home, office, or on the go)<br>→ Joins meetings in immersive 3D environments (VR/AR)<br>→ Collaborates with AI and virtual avatars<br>→ Uses spatial computing for interactive tasks<br>→ Onboards/trains in simulated environments |
| **POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES**<br>→ Clear work-life boundaries<br>→ Strong in-person relationships<br>→ Immediate feedback and support<br>→ Informal conversations to boost morale<br>→ Tangible sense of team and belonging | **POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES**<br>→ No geographic barriers-global collaboration (possible lower carbon footprint)<br>→ Immersive training/onboarding boosts retention<br>→ AI and spatial tools automate routine work<br>→ Flexible, adaptive workspace |
| **POSSIBLE DISADVANTAGES**<br>→ Commute time and costs<br>→ Fixed hours, less flexibility<br>→ Office distractions<br>→ Limited access to digital/remote tools<br>→ Collaboration limited to co-located colleagues | **POSSIBLE DISADVANTAGES**<br>→ Requires investment in hardware/software<br>→ Learning curve for new tech<br>→ Digital fatigue from extended VR/AR use<br>→ Privacy and data security concerns<br>→ Potential for reduced spontaneous social interaction |

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TREND 6

# Green-Collar Work & Skills

**One of the most important trends shaping the future of work is the rise of "green-collar" jobs and skills.**

In an AI-driven world, green-collar work represents not only a climate imperative, but also a source of resilient, future-proof employment.

Central to this shift is the rising prominence of the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework as a gauge of a company's impact on society. In response, many businesses are introducing more training programs to help workers live and work in more sustainable ways.

## What are green skills?

Green skills can be **technical**: installing solar panels, managing waste, but they can also be about **understanding sustainability of the business**, reducing carbon emissions, or making eco-friendly business decisions. **Climate literacy** is essential here.

## Green-collar workers: who are they?

Green collar workers are those responsible for jobs that are related to sustainability procedures and protecting environment in general.

When we look at green-collar jobs, we might discover that they are basically blue or sometimes white-collar jobs. The "green" aspect comes from the purpose and outcome of that work – it's directed towards environmental quality and sustainability.

- For example, EY and Microsoft created a program called **Green Skills Passport**. It helps people learn the skills needed for jobs in the green economy.
- LinkedIn reported in 2023 that **1 in 8 users** now list at least one green skill on their profile
- LinkedIn's 2024 green skills report shows globally that the share of job postings requiring "green" skills rose from **6.8% in 2021 to 7.5% in 2024.**
- The **International Labour Organization (ILO) projects the creation of approximately 24 million new jobs** worldwide within the green economy by the year 2030.

- Several new initiatives in Romania are specifically training workers for green jobs. For example, **RenewAcad** (Academy for Renewable Energies), funded by OMV Petrom and implemented with local foundations, has run multiple courses converting coal and power-plant workers into solar energy installers.

  In late 2023 RenewAcad began a training center in Târgu Jiu to teach 100 former coal miners how to install photovoltaic systems and by early 2024 it had already graduated dozens of electricians and mechanics as solar specialists.

  These programs target workers of all levels (no prior degree required) and are part of a wider push to upskill people from fossil-fuel industries into solar, wind and energy-efficiency roles.

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## What's next?

Along with the implementation of generative AI, the transition to green work could be seen as the next great labour market revolution. From legal to manufacturing, roles will be transformed.

Employers need to continue to bring people along during times of change, showing workers what the future could look like, guiding them to upskill and reskill, and creating green jobs that are attractive to all generations and collars.

## Green Work – what GenZ is saying?

Many young people are rethinking what they want from a career. Many of them want jobs that align with their values, especially when it comes to protecting the environment and tackling climate change. **61% of Gen Z workers say they want to get a green job** within the next five years.

The 2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey Report from Deloitte shows that around **45% of them have already left a job, or plan to, over climate concerns**. Moreover, Gen Z and Millennials are trying to save the planet by quitting jobs that aren't eco-friendly.

# WHAT WE SEE ALREADY HAPPENING

### RO Romania

- In Romania, the **EU's Just Transition Fund has earmarked about €2.14 billion (adopted September 2022) for coal-dependent regions** (Gorj, Hunedoara, etc.), specifically to help workers find new green jobs.
- Importantly, Romania ranks among the fastest-growing markets: LinkedIn data indicate Romania's green-talent job postings grew at **a 16.3% compound annual rate (2021–2024)** – among the highest in the world.

### HU Hungary

- Hungary's vocational training system has been updated as of November 2023. The new **VET standards explicitly include "green skills"** across trades.
- An OECD analysis finds green occupations in Hungary extremely tight: green jobs have **87.6% more vacancies per worker** than for the average jobs (far above the 29% EU/OECD norm).

## Global Signals of Change

- **Deciem** turned green energy into an employee benefit to help workers lower their carbon footprint.
- **Reed**, one of Britain's largest recruitment specialists, launched Reed Environment to address the green skills gap in the UK. The initiative aims to provide training in the environmental sector, focusing primarily on retrofitting skills to support the country's Net Zero targets.
- According to the **Green Jobs UK Barometer**, the proportion of green job adverts to total job adverts has grown across all regions and nations, reaching 3.3% in 2024 (up from 2.3% in 2023).
- **Les Nouveaux Géants** equips employees with new tools and objectives for eco-friendly operations. For this, they created courses that cover topics like analysing the product's life cycles, involving suppliers and other stakeholders, and calculating carbon pricing.

# TREND CANVAS
# FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION

**Select the trends that are relevant for you / your organization and start analyzing each of them** (e.g. what shifts are driving it, and what new expectations are emerging).

**Then ask:** What could we do with it? What value might it unlock? What changes should we prepare for—in roles, teams, or culture?

## TREND:

## ANALYZE

**Goal:** Make sense of the trend and why it matters now.

### 01. Foundational Needs

What fundamental needs—of employees, employers, or society—does this trend respond to?
(E.g., security, flexibility, inclusion, autonomy, purpose)

### 02. Drivers of Change

Why is this trend emerging now? What's pushing it forward?

### 03. Emerging Outcomes

What new expectations, tensions, or behaviors are showing up among workers, leaders, or customers?

## APPLY

**Goal:** Translate insight into implications and strategy.

### 04. Strategic Opportunities

What value could this trend unlock for:

**Organizations** (efficiency, culture, strategy),

**Teams** (collaboration, engagement),

**Workers** (wellbeing, development, mobility).

### 05. Operational Impact

How might this trend reshape roles, workflows, workspaces, or decision-making?

### 06. Organizational Response

What actions could we take to anticipate or respond?

**Consider:** hiring practices, upskilling needs, cultural alignment, leadership mindset, tech integration.


THE
FUTURE
IS OUR SOURCE OF
IMAGINATION

# WILD CARDS TO STRETCH OUR IMAGINATION

While the trends show structured shifts, here are a few possible **'wild cards' — low-probability but high-impact developments** that could change everything.

Because **wild cards** can happen suddenly and unexpectedly, we may not always have time to prepare.

Exploring this kind of futures encourage us to consider possibilities that we might otherwise overlook.

**They invite us to prepare for uncertainty and explore new responses.**

WILD CARD

**AI Unions and Worker Bots** emerge, demanding recognition and rights within the workplace. Debates intensify around autonomy, ethical boundaries, and the nature of agency in AI systems.

WILD CARD

**Remote work taxation becomes a global dispute**. As more professionals work across borders, countries compete for tax rights, creating legal uncertainty and new compliance challenges, especially for startups and digital nomads.

WILD CARD

**Mass displacement due to extreme weather** makes physical workplaces inaccessible for extended periods, disrupting supply chains and accelerating the shift toward resilient digital infrastructure and decentralized work models.

WILD CARD

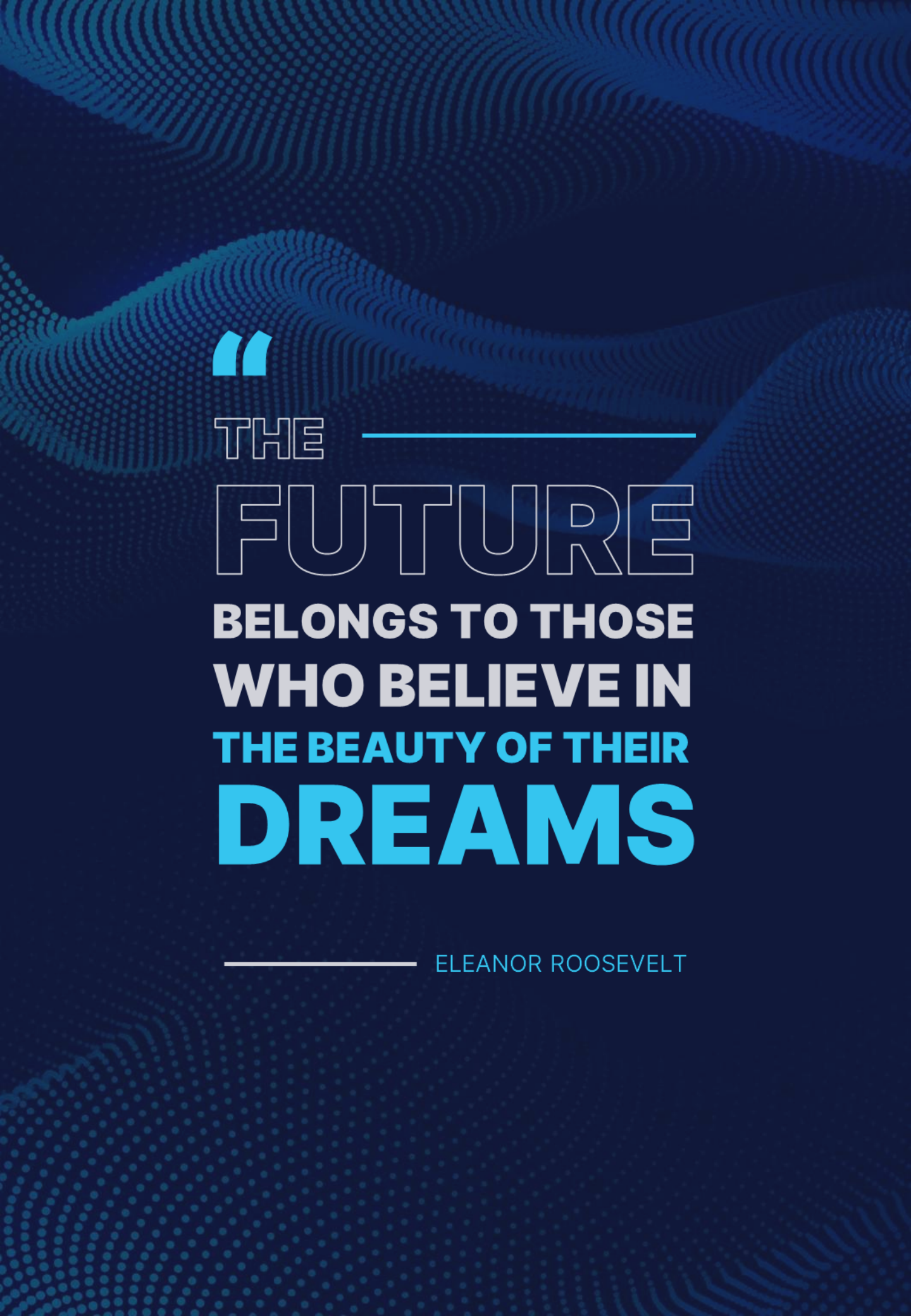
**A new productivity divide emerges:** workers with access to advanced AI assistants outperform peers dramatically. Premium salaries flow to "AI-augmented" workers, while the rest fall behind.

WILD CARD

**AI eliminates entire job categories —** from entry-level to senior roles—faster than institutions or societies can adapt, leading to sharp polarization and increased social tension.

WILD CARD

**A full-scale cyber conflict disables critical digital infrastructure across multiple countries.** Entire industries are paralyzed as banking systems, cloud platforms, and communication networks go dark. Organizations scramble to activate analog backups and physical contingency plans. The crisis triggers a global rethink: should all companies have a "manual mode"? Suddenly, digital resilience becomes as vital as innovation—and "tech minimalism" enters the corporate agenda.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THE FUTURE
BELONGS TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE BEAUTY OF THEIR DREAMS
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

# WHICH FUTURES ARE YOU DREAMING OF?

# WHAT THE FUTURE MIGHT LOOK LIKE?

After completing the research phase—analyzing trends, signals of change, and structural shifts—we wanted to take the next step: to explore possible futures. However, envisioning the future also requires a realistic assessment of the forces that may accelerate or hinder change.

**To support this exploration, we propose using a foresight method known as the Futures Triangle. This tool helps map out how different forces interact to shape the future.**

## WHAT IS THE FUTURES TRIANGLE?

**The Futures Triangle framework identifies three types of forces:**

**Pushes of the Present**

Trends and signals of change that are actively influencing the system (many of which were outlined in previous chapters).

**Weights of the Past**

Barriers that slow down progress, such as outdated policies, institutional inertia, or persistent mindsets.

These may also include values or practices we deliberately choose to preserve.

**Pulls of the Future**

Desirable futures, visions, or aspirations that draw us forward.

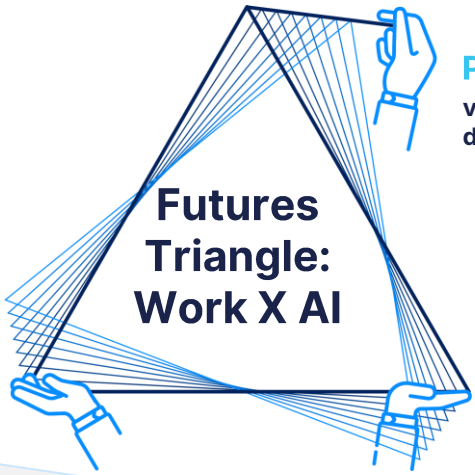
This tool helps structure thinking around not only what could happen, but what is likely or desirable—highlighting both momentum and resistance.

We have used the Futures Triangle in a crowdsourced format, with a focus on the Pulls of the Future: What are the emerging aspirations, scenarios, or visions that could shape the future of work in CEE?

By making these pulls explicit, we can better understand the direction of change—and begin to imagine how current efforts might align with or diverge from them.

# FUTURES TRIANGLE

Future Station adaptation
after S. Inayatullah 2008




## PULLs of the Future

**visions, hopes, desirable outcomes**

- AI to help people ease their job
- **AI** to provide continuous professional **qualifications**
- Imagine **AI literacy** is introduced in RO **educational curriculum**
- AI to aid old people and keep them in the work market
- Expectancy of Universal Basic Income or Universal Basic Services
- **What if HR becomes HMR (Human-Machine Resources)?**
- Data-annotation work creates jobs for linguists, programmers and auditors of AI for AI teaching/taming
- What if people had 'career sabbaticals' or 'micro-pensions' every 7 years?
- Imagine incentive programs for companies to build **multigenerational teams**
- **Gain more free time, find meaning outside work (that will be done faster with AI)**
- Increased productivity will provide higher incomes
- Imagine remote work hubs in rural Romania, powered by AI productivity tools

## PUSHes of the Present

**trends, technologies, current drivers, emerging changes**

- **Rise of AI platforms**
- Emerging **legislation on AI**
- Micro-work
- On-demand work
- **The rise of data-annotation work**
- Some jobs are lost, some people without digital skills find it more difficult to find a job
- Advocate for proactive skilling and reskilling policies
- **Difficulties to determine human from AI generated content**
- AI augmentation of work
- Exacerbation of the general lack of trust across the society
- **Advancement of AI technologies in critical sectors (health)**
- **Easy to use / adopt by all people irrespective of the level of education**
- Organize and bargain around AI implementation

## WEIGHTs of the Past

**barriers, legacy systems, cultural blocks**

- The 'mystical' unknown that new tech brings, the 'what if' of change and the 'scenario' of tech going against humanity
- Underfunded education system with outdated (tech) curricula
- **Anxiety of tech replacing jobs**
- Reluctance towards new technologies
- **Cultural & religious beliefs & resistance towards new technolo**
- **High functional illiteracy rate**
- No history of regulation of tech
- Modernize organizing and communication
- **Challenge the ideea of technological determinism & extract opportunities**
- Learn from history and proactively engage

### Imagine a future where work is no longer central to identity.

In this world, AI has automated most repetitive labour. Governments have decoupled basic income from employment, and societies place greater value on caregiving, learning, and civic contribution. **Career paths are non-linear and fluid**; life is organized around contribution, not job titles. Organizations compete not for hours worked—but for purpose shared.

### Imagine a future with a dynamic pension system (e.g. sabbaticals & micro-pension).

Every 7 years, individuals are entitled to a paid "career pause" — a regenerative break funded by a **micro-pension** system. Whether used for caregiving, study, rest, or starting something new, these pauses are not seen as career gaps but as **essential phases of growth**. Work is no longer a continuous line, but a **cycle of contribution and renewal**, supported by both employers and policy.

### Imagine a future where HR evolves into HCM — Human–Capital Management for hybrid teams.

In this future, managers no longer lead only people—they also coordinate AI agents and robotic collaborators. Human leaders are trained to manage **hybrid teams**, combining emotional intelligence with systems thinking.

Performance reviews consider both human input and machine feedback. Managers ensure **alignment, transparency, and ethical use of algorithms**—balancing productivity with wellbeing. HCM becomes a strategic function at the intersection of tech, people, and purpose.

### Imagine a future with remote work hubs in rural Romania.

Revitalized villages become digital sanctuaries. Equipped with AI productivity tools, these hubs attract remote professionals, returnees from the diaspora, and local talent. **Rural areas flourish** with new energy, ideas, and infrastructure.

### Imagine a future where AI agents are part of your employee benefits.

In this future, AI is not just a tool — it's a co-worker. Employees receive, alongside traditional perks like meal tickets or extra days off, **AI agent subscriptions** tailored to their role: writing assistants, research bots, mental health copilots, or workflow optimizers. Just like you'd expect access to a gym or health insurance, you now expect access to intelligent digital support.

### Imagine a future where we have Universal Basic Income or Universal Basic Services.

As automation scales, **society redefines the social contract.** People receive a guaranteed baseline for living—covering essentials like housing, education, and transport—giving them the freedom to pursue learning, caregiving, or creative work without constant financial pressure.

### Imagine a future where AI literacy is introduced in the Romanian curriculum.

From primary school onwards, **students learn how algorithms work, how to use AI responsibly**, and how to think critically about automation. This new literacy reduces digital exclusion and prepares the next generation to shape—not just survive—the AI era.

# WHICH FUTURES DO YOU PREFER?

### Imagine a future where AI productivity fuels a shared dividend.

As AI systems drive massive efficiency gains, a new AI dividend or automation tax is introduced. Companies that benefit significantly from AI are required to reinvest a portion of that value into society—funding education, reskilling, public infrastructure, or even direct payments to citizens. **It's a future where the benefits of automation are distributed more fairly, not concentrated.**


THE
FUTURE
NEEDS MORE
OPTIMISTS!

# METHODOLOGY

## HOW WE BUILT THIS REPORT

→ Horizon scanning, stakeholder consultation, Futures Triangle, Visioning

**This report is grounded in strategic foresight, designed to explore how the world of work is evolving in the context of AI.**

We used foresight methodologies such as horizon scanning and stakeholder consultation, applying the STEEP framework to identify relevant Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political signals of change. The scanning process drew on a broad mix of sources — academic publications, think-tank reports, media articles, policy papers, and innovation studies — with a particular focus on Central and Eastern Europe. Our aim was to go beyond surface-level trends and uncover early-stage developments and potential wild cards. To ensure regional relevance, we engaged stakeholders from Hungary and Romania to validate and localize the identified trends.

*Note: While questions of AI ethics, regulations, and governance are essential, they are beyond the scope of this report.*

Subsequently, we used the **Futures Triangle** – a tool for mapping the three forces shaping the future:

- → **Pulls of the future** – what people aspire to
- → **Pushes of the present** – current trends and drivers
- → **Weights of the past** – existing barriers and inertia.

Participants were asked to reflect on these forces in their local context. This helped surface tensions and contradictions, such as the clash between aspirations for digital leadership and the reality of limited infrastructure or political will.

Finally, we developed **multiple future visions** based on the aspirational "pulls" identified — exploring *"What if?"* questions and *"Imagine a future where..."* narratives. We believe the future is not written — it is imagined, shaped, and built. This makes it not only a space of uncertainty, but also our source of imagination. **We invite readers to imagine better:** more inclusive, more resilient, and more optimistic futures. Because in the end — **we cannot build what we cannot imagine!**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**You've explored trends, signals, and scenarios. The next step is to turn foresight into meaningful change. Here are three concrete actions to help you and your team make the future of work part of your strategy.**

## 1. CHALLENGE OUTDATED ASSUMPTIONS

Many long-held beliefs about work no longer reflect today's reality—or tomorrow's. The first step toward adaptive thinking is to question what we take for granted.

→ **Action:** **Host** a short team discussion. **Identify** 2–3 assumptions about the future of work that may be outdated. Example: "Automation only affects manual labour." **Reflect** on how those assumptions have shaped past decisions—and what new thinking is needed now.

## 2. MAINTAIN A LIVE TREND RADAR

Trends evolve. What's weak today may grow stronger tomorrow. Organisations need more than a static report—they need a living radar to track signals, shifts, and tensions as they emerge.

→ **Action:** **Choose** 4–6 priority trend areas relevant to your domain. **Set up** a simple team radar (using a shared document, Miro board, or internal tool). **Assign** trend "owners" to track developments and bring updates every quarter. **Use** this radar in planning, hiring, product decisions, or leadership conversations.

## 3. BUILD A #FUTUREFIT SKILLS INVENTORY

Each trend points to new skills—technical, human, ethical—that will shape future readiness. It's not enough to observe; we need to practice.

→ **Action:** For each trend, **list 1-3** critical skills it calls for. **Choose** one to focus on and set a 30-day learning goal. **Share** your intention with a colleague or manager. **Plan** a check-in to track progress and reflect on what you've learned.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Future Station** undertook the trends scanning and analysis, the experts' interviews and subsequently, the writing of this report.

**Future Station is a foresight consultancy practice which engages in activities such as strategic planning (trend scanning and scenario planning) or training teams for future realities.** Clients served range from industries such as retail to telecom, financial services to FMCG, energy and healthcare, plus NGOs and public institutions.

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