BHEF BUSINESS-HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM®

How to Build an AI-Resilient Workforce

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As AI accelerates change across every sector, business and higher education leaders are grappling with the future of work: what do roles impacted by AI look like? What skills do people need to thrive in the workplace?

From classrooms to boardrooms, AI alters how tasks are done, decisions are made, and value is created. Both employers and educators face the same challenge: ensuring their employees and learners have the skills to adapt, innovate, and lead responsibly in an AI-driven world.

> By 2030, **70% of the skills used in most jobs will change**, with AI emerging as a catalyst. Employers expect about **60% of their workforce will need upskilling and reskilling.** *WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, THE FUTURE OF JOBS REPORT 2025*[1]

In addition to AI fluency, these shifts require a shared understanding of how people and organizations can grow with AI over time. The scale and pace at which organizations must reskill their employees for AI demands fundamentally different models than what exists today. For higher education leaders and corporate executives alike, the question lies in how to begin when the AI landscape keeps shifting.

An Industry-Validated Solution for Business and Higher Education

At the Business-Higher Education Forum, we know that employers sit closest to the changes AI is driving in the workplace and which skills will matter most. We also know that higher education provides the reach, infrastructure, and credibility to scale solutions that prepare learners for the future of work.

Our mission is to empower and catalyze collaborations that accelerate inclusive pathways that open doors for learners and cultivate the talent that businesses need to grow and thrive. Our network enables higher education and businesses to co-develop solutions that build a skilled, adaptable workforce that drives innovation. The AI-Enabled Professional Framework embodies this mission.

To figure out which skills will be essential in the AI-transformed workplace, we partnered with leaders across industries and higher education to develop the AI-Enabled Professional Framework. This employer-validated, industry-agnostic, and practical framework gives companies and colleges a shared language for what it truly means to be AI-ready, and, most importantly, gives a pathway to get their talent there.

Traditional workforce planning cycles can't keep pace with AI's rapid evolution, and neither business nor education can solve this challenge alone. This framework provides the shared language and structure that enables both sectors to move quickly together — bridging the gap between what employers need and what educators are able to deploy at scale. Instead of featuring rigid predictions about skills that may shift before programs even launch, it offers a flexible, employer-validated structure that supports immediate action while accommodating inevitable uncertainty.

Informed by input from over a hundred cross-industry leaders, the AI-Enabled Professional Framework identifies the human and technical competencies needed to use AI thoughtfully, responsibly, and effectively. And, while it was built for the current generative AI environment, the framework is designed to evolve as technology advances.

[1] World Economic Forum (2025) *The Future of Jobs Report 2025*. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/

Seven Core Competencies That Matter

The framework defines seven essential competencies that every individual, from entry-level to executive, needs to thrive in an AI-augmented workplace. These competencies exist in tandem with a person's domain expertise. A skilled nurse still needs clinical knowledge, and a tax accountant must still understand financial principles. What changes is how professionals apply their expertise alongside AI tools and systems while keeping human judgment, creativity, and ethical reasoning at the center of their work.

Many of the core competencies of an AI-enabled professional are durable skills: capabilities that remain increasingly valuable even as technology evolves. Training on a particular software platform may become outdated or obsolete, but capabilities like critical thinking and adaptability translate across roles and career stages. These seven core competencies enable workers to move beyond routine tasks and focus on higher-impact work that AI cannot replicate.

1. **AI LITERACY:** Understand what AI is, how it works, and where it fits into an employee's role.

   In practice: A marketing manager recognizes that AI can generate draft copy but knows to verify brand voice, check for factual accuracy, and ensure messaging aligns with strategic goals.

2. **DATA LITERACY:** Understand and interpret data to make AI insights actionable.

   In practice: A healthcare administrator reviews patient flow predictions from an AI dashboard, but leverages their understanding of staffing limitations and community health needs to allocate resources effectively.

3. **CRITICAL THINKING, PROBLEM-SOLVING, AND CREATIVITY:** Evaluate AI-generated outputs, spot flawed reasoning, and prompt systems in ways that lead to better answers.

   In practice: A financial analyst spots when AI-generated risk assessments miss contextual factors like regulatory changes or market sentiment that require human interpretation.

4. **ETHICS, GOVERNANCE, AND RESPONSIBLE AI USE:** Spot bias, ensure transparency, and uphold compliance.

   In practice: A loan officer questions why an AI system denied an application, investigating whether the model perpetuates historical inequities before accepting its recommendation.

5. **DIGITAL AND COMPUTATIONAL SKILLS:** Navigate digital environments, interpret automation logic, and understand how computational systems function.

   In practice: A warehouse supervisor troubleshoots AI-powered inventory systems when outputs seem incorrect, understanding how the system processes data to identify whether the issue stems from incorrect inputs, connectivity problems, or system errors.

6. **COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION:** Communicate across functions, translate technical information, and collaborate with colleagues and AI systems.

   In practice: A customer service team leader trains representatives on how to use AI chat assist tools for increased efficiency while maintaining the empathy and nuanced communication that customers value.

7. **ADAPTABILITY AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING:** Cultivate the mindset to learn, unlearn, and pivot.

   In practice: A paralegal adapts from manual document review to overseeing AI-assisted contract analysis, developing new skills in prompt engineering and output validation while staying current on legal standards.

What Competencies Do AI-Enabled Professionals Need Across Their Career Journeys?

AI is reshaping what professionals need to know, do, and become. **These seven core competencies evolve with a professional's career**—from entry level roles to executive leadership.

Five Career Stages: Meeting People Where They Are

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AI readiness looks different depending on where someone is in their career. The framework maps the seven core competencies across five career stages, from aspiring learners to executive leaders, recognizing that the depth and application of each competency evolves with responsibility and experience.

These career stages are not meant to demonstrate a career pathway. Rather, by clearly articulating how AI competencies evolve across different career stages, this framework enables businesses and higher education institutions to tailor upskilling efforts to the right audience, at the right depth, and with the right outcomes in mind.

Early career professionals like Career Starters and Emerging Professionals face a vastly different landscape than previous generations. As AI automates routine tasks that previously were integral to early-career roles and a part of on-the-job learning—such as

basic data entry, report generation, and document drafting—employers increasingly expect junior talent to operate closer to a Skilled Practitioner level.

For employers, the career stages enable resources to be allocated where they will have the most impact, ensuring that AI skill-building aligns with both job function, as well as current and future business objectives.

For higher education institutions, the stages provide a structured way to think about how AI-related learning unfolds across a student's academic journey to prepare aspiring learners and career starters, and how continuing education extends into lifelong learning to upskill emerging professionals and prepare people to step into strategic and executive leadership roles.

1	2	3	4	5
ASPIRING LEARNER / CAREER STARTER	**EMERGING PROFESSIONAL**	**SKILLED PRACTITIONER**	**STRATEGIC LEADER**	**EXECUTIVE LEADER**
Postsecondary learners, interns, or pre-apprenticeship learners	Recent graduates, apprentices, or early-career hires	Subject-matter experts, experienced technicians, applied industry-specific specialists	Manages teams and sponsors projects	Shapes organizational direction and influences policy

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS | MANAGERIAL

Where a professional is in their career impacts how they use AI and what skills sets they need.

The AI-Enabled Professional Framework

Intentionally designed as a tool, not a rigid prescription, the AI-Enabled Professional Framework gives employers and higher education partners a way to have more nuanced discussions around what employees need at different stages in their career, moving beyond generic "AI skills" to specific, actionable competencies.

Critically, the framework demonstrates how skills evolve as careers grow. For example, an emerging professional manufacturing technician needs foundational AI literacy to understand what "predictive maintenance" means, while an executive leader needs to guide enterprise-wide AI strategy and investment decisions. Both need AI literacy, but at vastly different depths and applications.

The progression shows the lifelong learning journey that AI demands from every professional, at every level. The career stages are not meant to be a pathway or roadmap for career advancement. Rather, they provide a structured way to think about someone's current role and responsibilities. A skilled practitioner might stay in that stage for decades, deepening their expertise. That's the strength of the framework; it meets people where they are.

| COMPETENCIES	ASPIRING LEARNER / CAREER STARTER	EMERGING PROFESSIONAL	SKILLED PRACTITIONER	STRATEGIC LEADER	EXECUTIVE LEADER
AI Literacy	Understand basic AI concepts and terminology	Apply AI concepts to tasks; aware of emerging AI tools	Integrate AI into projects and workflows	Shape organizational AI adoption strategies	Guide enterprise-wide AI strategy and investments
Data Literacy	Interpret basic data and visualizations	Use data insights for decisions; recognize bias	Manage and model data for AI insights	Oversee ethical and effective data use	Set data and AI governance frameworks
Critical Thinking, Problem-solving, & Creativity	Question AI outputs; identify basic risks	Solve problems using AI tools under guidance	Independently select and deploy AI solutions	Lead AI-enabled complex problem-solving	Anticipate systemic AI challenges and opportunities
Ethics, Governance & Responsible AI Use	Recognize ethical issues (bias, privacy)	Practice responsible AI use	Lead responsible AI initiatives in teams	Shape organizational responsible AI policies	Champion public and global responsible AI leadership
Digital & Computational Skills	Use AI-powered applications; basic tech comfort	Modify and optimize workflows with AI	Integrate, manage, or build AI-enhanced tools	Drive AI-based digital transformation	Architect future-ready digital and AI ecosystems
Collaboration & Communication In AI Context	Explain basic AI concepts to peers	Collaborate in AI-augmented teams	Lead multidisciplinary AI teams	Align AI messaging across business functions	Influence enterprise and public AI narratives
Adaptability & Continuous Learning	Stay curious and open to AI trends	Experiment with new AI tools and methods	Advocate for AI learning among peers	Sponsor organizational AI learning initiatives	Lead industry-wide AI workforce development efforts

MANUFACTURING
Entry-Level Technician (Emerging Professional)

An early-career manufacturing technician operates, monitors, and maintains AI-enabled machinery and production lines. They increasingly interact with predictive maintenance tools, IoT sensors, and smart robots.

Business application: This emerging professional needs AI literacy to understand concepts like "predictive maintenance" and "anomaly detection." Data literacy helps them read dashboards and sensor alerts. Critical thinking helps them identify when AI predictions might be wrong (false alarms) and use human judgment to escalate issues. Digital skills mean they can use AI-powered control tablets and digital dashboards and enter accurate information into maintenance systems.

Higher education application: A community college can use this technician profile to design a manufacturing technology certificate that builds the AI literacy, data literacy, and digital skills the role relies on. Learners practice interpreting sensor data, responding to AI-generated alerts, and using digital dashboards in lab simulations. This ensures graduates can apply these competencies immediately in AI-enabled production environments.

THE FRAMEWORK IN ACTION
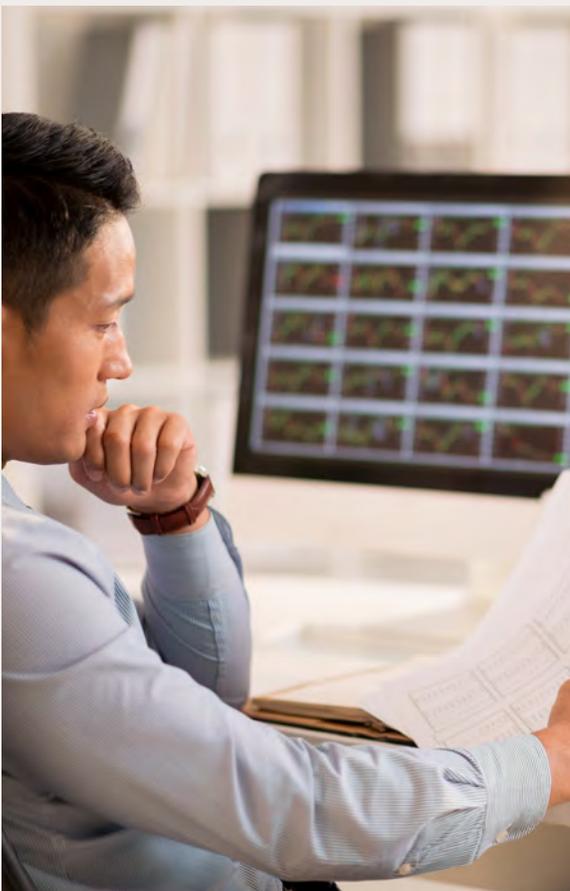
INSURANCE
Lead Claims or Underwriting Specialist (Skilled Practitioner)

A lead claims or underwriting specialist in an insurance company applies advanced analytical expertise and AI-enabled tools to evaluate claims, assess risk, and support accurate, efficient underwriting decisions.

Business application: This skilled practitioner needs to understand the AI models behind claims triage and fraud detection, read dashboards and KPIs generated from AI systems, and flag edge cases where AI may reinforce bias. They ensure compliance with AI use policies and act as translators between technical teams and business leaders. They stay current on AI regulations and participate in pilots and upskilling initiatives.

Higher education application: A university could use this specialist profile to strengthen business analytics or risk management programs by integrating relevant AI, data, and governance competencies. Learners examine how claims and risk models function, interpret AI-generated indicators, and apply responsible-use practices aligned with industry compliance. This ensures graduates can use these competencies directly in AI-enabled insurance environments.

A Playbook for Business Leaders

Ensuring your people are equipped to thrive in an AI-enabled workforce requires both strategic clarity and human-centered sensitivity. This three-pronged approach moves from internal preparation to external partnership, building organizational readiness before scaling to ecosystem collaboration.

Build the Internal Foundation

Assess your organization with clear ownership and strategic intent. Designate a senior leader or small, cross-functional team to lead this work, with representation from technology, human resources, and learning or workforce development. Use the framework to understand and assess your current workforce capabilities. Frame this as discovery with the goal of being to understand where capabilities exist and where investment is needed, not to identifying deficiencies. Keep the process lean to avoid excessive workload on already-busy teams.

Be transparent about goals and distinguish automation from augmentation. Communicate clearly and early that this is about enhancement, not replacement. Some tasks will be automated—freeing people from repetitive work. But most AI applications augment human capability, improving productivity and creating opportunities for career growth.

Identify priority roles where AI is actively transforming work. Start with positions where AI changes workflows, decision-making, and value creation most significantly. Use the occupation profile approach to map which competencies matter most for these roles. This focused approach allows you to test, learn, and refine before broader rollout.

Establish clear timelines and phases. Ambiguity creates anxiety. Share your roadmap with specific milestones so employees understand what happens when. Break implementation into digestible phases so change feels manageable rather than overwhelming.

Cultivate Organizational Culture

Create safe activations of AI use internally. Share the framework with human resources, learning and development, IT, and business unit leaders. Start with lower-risk opportunities to grow AI capability from within, developing expertise organically.

Build peer leadership. Convene leadership groups and use internal tools to ID early adopters, track usage, and create organizational champions.

Embed learning in workflow, not as separate training. Following Microsoft's "working to skill" approach,[2] identify opportunities to build AI capability into how employees already work, integrating learning into daily tasks. This makes skill development immediate and relevant.

Move fast and be responsible. Speed matters—AI capabilities evolve quickly and competitive advantage is retained by the early movers—but reckless implementation undermines trust, creates compliance risk, and can damage your workforce and reputation. Responsible agility means piloting thoughtfully, learning from missteps quickly, and scaling what works.

[2] Business-Higher Education Forum (2025) "Corporate leaders challenge the field to reimagine work, not just retool it." BHEF Blog. Available at: https://www.bhef.com/article/blog/2025/corporate-leaders-challenge-the-field-to-reimagine-work-not-just-retool-it

PHASE 3

Activate Higher Education Partnerships

Use the framework as a shared language with higher education. The competencies your organization develops become the common language for skills and competencies with colleges and universities. This enables specificity regarding which competencies matter for roles at various career stages.

Co-develop programs and learning pathways that address job needs. Structure partnership conversations with the framework as a starting point, specifying competency needs and learning delivery methods. Proven partnership models and implementation processes, like BHEF's Partnership Implementation Process,[3] can support the shift from transactional relationships to strategic collaboration.

Keep durable skills and ethical use central. Higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to develop the durable skills that transcend any specific technology. Technical skills are important to cultivate, but human judgment, ethical reasoning, and adaptability matter more than ever.

Stay agile. The framework is designed as a "living" tool that evolves alongside the technology itself. Commit to regular reviews and updates as AI capabilities and business needs shift.

[3] Business-Higher Education Forum. 2018. "Creating Purposeful Partnerships: Business and Higher Education Working Together to Build Regional Talent Ecosystems for the Digital Economy." https://www.bhef.com/sites/default/files/BHEF_Partnership-Handbook-FINAL-V3.pdf

A Playbook for Higher Education Leaders

Implementing the AI-Enabled Professional Framework in higher education requires balancing urgency with academic integrity, innovation with governance, and responsiveness with scale. This three-phase approach helps institutions move from internal alignment to employer-engaged action.

Build Institutional Readiness

Assess programs with academic context and trust at the center. Use the framework as a diagnostic lens to understand where AI-related competencies already exist across courses, programs, and co-curricular experiences—and where gaps are emerging. This effort is not a compliance exercise or undermining of faculty expertise. Using the process as discovery builds trust and surfaces strengths that may already be embedded in disciplinary teaching.

Clarify the role of AI in learning. Communicate clearly with faculty, staff, and students that AI is not about automating education or diminishing disciplinary rigor. Instead, it is about augmenting teaching, learning, and professional preparation. Distinguish between using AI as a learning tool, teaching about AI as a subject, and preparing students to work alongside AI in their future careers.

Identify priority disciplines and learner populations. Start where AI is already reshaping career outcomes—such as business, health care, manufacturing, IT, education, and public service—or where enrollment, employer demand, or equity gaps are most acute. Focus initial efforts on a subset of programs or credentials to pilot, learn, and refine before scaling institution-wide.

Align timelines with academic planning cycles without letting them slow momentum. Establish clear phases that respect curriculum review calendars, accreditation requirements, and shared governance processes, while still enabling early action through pilots, modular updates, and co-curricular or noncredit offerings. Breaking implementation into manageable stages allows institutions to test, learn, and refine in real time in a way that builds evidence and faculty confidence without overwhelming faculty or disrupting students' progress to completion.

Enable Faculty and Institutional Culture

Create low-risk spaces for experimentation. Support faculty and instructional teams with safe environments to explore AI tools, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies. Pilot within electives, certificates, labs, or co-curricular experiences where flexibility is greater and lessons can be applied broadly.

Empower faculty champions and cross-functional leaders. Identify and support early adopters across disciplines, centers for teaching and learning, workforce development units, and IT. Create communities of practice where faculty and staff can share use cases, challenges, and insights tied to the framework's competencies.

Embed AI learning into existing courses and experiences. Rather than treating AI as an add-on or standalone requirement, integrate AI-enabled competencies into disciplinary contexts—how students already learn, practice, and demonstrate mastery. This approach preserves academic depth while ensuring relevance to evolving workplace expectations.

Balance speed with responsibility. Higher education plays a critical role in modeling responsible AI use. Move with intention in piloting, assessing outcomes, and iterating while centering ethics, academic integrity, accessibility, and equity. Responsible innovation builds confidence among faculty, students, employers, and accreditors alike.

Activate Employer and Ecosystem Partnerships

Use the framework as a shared language with employers. The AI-Enabled Professional Framework enables clearer, more productive conversations with employers about skills, competencies, and career stages. It helps translate workforce needs into academic terms without reducing education to narrow job training.

Map programs to workforce demand. Compare employer-identified competencies with existing curricula, credentials, and learning experiences. Identify where programs already align, where modest updates can increase relevance, and where new offerings like certificates, microcredentials, or work-based learning may be needed.

Co-develop learning pathways tied to real outcomes. Use the framework to structure partnership discussions around learning objectives, delivery models, and assessment in addition to work-integrated learning opportunities or advisory boards. This shifts relationships from transactional to strategic, enabling scalable, employer-engaged education.

Center durable skills and ethical reasoning. One of higher education's greatest value lies in developing durable, transferable capabilities like critical thinking, judgment, adaptability, and ethical reasoning. Technical AI skills will change, but these human competencies will define long-term career resilience and civic leadership.

Commit to continuous renewal. AI is not slowing down, and curricula can't stand still. Treat the framework as a living tool, revisiting competency alignment and employer input regularly to ensure programs remain current, credible, and future-facing.

The Competitive Advantage

AI skills carry a 28% premium in median advertised salary[4] for job postings with at least one AI skill compared to similar roles without AI. Meanwhile, employment for younger workers in AI-impacted jobs has dropped by 16% since late 2022,[5] and 77% of entry-level professionals report they're expected to perform at a higher level with AI.[6]

The future of work won't wait for traditional planning cycles, and neither should talent development strategies. Organizations that act now using industry-validated approaches like this framework will gain a sharp competitive advantage in attracting, developing, and retaining the talent they need to thrive in an AI-powered world.

16%
DECLINE IN EMPLOYMENT
FOR YOUNGER WORKERS IN AI-IMPACTED JOBS SINCE LATE 2022.

Ready to Put It All into Action?

Contact the Business-Higher Education Forum to learn how leading organizations are implementing the AI-Enabled Professional Framework: info@bhef.com

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO STAY INVOLVED:
- Stay up to date with the AI and Future of Talent Collaborative
- Share your implementation examples to help build the field's knowledge
- Contact us for support in implementing the framework at your organization
- Learn about joining our network at www.bhef.com

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[4] Lightcast (2025) *Beyond the buzz: Developing the AI skills employers actually need.* Available at: https://lightcast.io/resources/research/beyond-the-buzz-developing-the-ai-skills-employers-actually-need

[5] Brynjolfsson, E., Chandar, B. and Chen, R. (2025) *Canaries in the coal mine? Six facts about the recent employment effects of artificial intelligence.* Stanford Digital Economy Lab. Available at: https://digitaleconomy.stanford.edu/app/uploads/2025/11/CanariesintheCoalMine_Nov25.pdf

[6] Lascaze, E. et al. (2024) *AI is likely to impact careers. How can organizations help build a resilient early career workforce?,* Deloitte Insights. Available at: https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/ai-in-the-workplace.html

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