

# Unleashing talent in the Age of With

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Artificial intelligence (AI) and its ability to augment human workers is one of the most influential forces shaping the future of work. As AI adoption advances, the way organisations do their work is evolving.



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According to Deloitte's [Unleashing Talent in the age of With](#) report, 71% of adopters' reported that AI technologies have already changed their company's job roles and necessary skills. Alongside this, a resounding 82% believe that AI will lead to moderate or substantial changes to job roles and skills over the next three years.

As companies gain experience with building artificial intelligence (AI) systems, skill needs shift from a focus on "AI researchers" to a desire for business leaders capable of interpreting AI results and insights.

South Africa and Africa at large are no different than the rest of the world when it comes to the AI skills gap. We have seen a significant number of companies looking to expand their AI offerings only to struggle to find the right skills. Almost half of all organisations surveyed recently in SA indicated that their organisation as whole didn't understand what digital skills were required and how to acquire them in order to enable the company to make the transition to being AI-led.

Covid-19 has propelled us into Industry 4.0 faster than expected. It is more critical now than ever to adapt in order to survive. The current demand for AI skills in our market is huge. This can be seen purely from looking at the number of job postings, discussions and general direction companies are taking. The pandemic has significantly accelerated the pace of this transformation and in turn, increased the need and demand for AI skills in general. Encouragingly, Covid-19 has led to all industries really embracing the technology in a positive way, enforcing this change with numerous companies and as a result, accelerating their digitalisation efforts over the last few months.

## Adoption strategies

Locally, there are two approaches that businesses are focused on in their efforts to fast-track their adoption of AI. The first is by hiring individuals to lead teams and own the technology strategy for the firm. The success of this approach is dependent on companies ensuring that they have the correct, qualified individuals who will be capable of guiding the team

itself. Many companies embarking on AI initiatives may feel the need to hire AI superstars, as they need technically strong people who know how to best make use of the technology and opportunities, as opposed to training and upskilling everyone in the organisation. This approach has taught many industries that if a company has the ability and opportunity to acquire experienced senior individuals, it is highly recommended because this increases the scale of time to value tremendously.

The second is the focus on upskilling specific individuals and juniors in-house, which is the ideal way to go in general. The success of this approach is dependent on organisations being supportive of lifelong learners. The days of a single career are behind us and instead, people seek constant opportunity to learn new skills and evolve their job responsibilities.

One of the primary concerns around the implementation of AI is future loss of jobs. This has been an ongoing conversation, but is often clouded by a lack of understanding of the technology. Whilst some jobs will certainly be lost, the opportunity that AI creates for job creation is tremendous. Global research and advisory firm, Gartner, predicts that AI will stop being a net “taker” of jobs and rather become a net “giver”, creating more jobs as a result of AI technologies and reducing redundancies.

## No silver bullet

This needs to be understood alongside the lack of ability to find the required skills and initial prototypes or engagements involving AI not generating the anticipated value. AI is not the silver bullet that will fix everything, rather it is a very powerful tool for the long term if a company invests (and continues to invest) in the technology. The saying still stands: “Rome wasn’t built in a day”. An AI-centric organisation can’t be built by one initiative on its own.

In order for the adoption of AI to be a success, leaders need to ensure they focus on value creation, think about the future of their organisation, and hire individuals that can translate the business problem into the technical considerations of an AI solution. These individuals can either be hired in-house or augmented through various methods. The size and structure of this mix between in-house and augmented staff depends on the size, strategy and future roadmap of the AI team of which every company needs to align to.

However, the ethical principles, and debates, surrounding AI have to be taken seriously, with continued examination through whitepapers, regulations and thought pieces on the subject. Any company moving into the world of AI needs to seriously consider how the ethics and risks of AI technology will be managed. This is not something that can be postponed during the digitization process but should rather be at the forefront of everything the organisation does.

***What is the Age of With? Machine learning algorithms and platforms powered by Artificial Intelligence and analytics are already becoming mainstream. At Deloitte, we call this the “Age of With,” humans working with AI. The technology is smart, but we make sure the way it’s used is smarter.***

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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