AI Is Moving Faster Than Your Workforce Strategy. Are You Ready?

SEPTEMBER 2025

KEY TAKEAWAYS

AI is rapidly and radically changing the tasks workers undertake, the talent companies need, and the ways teams interact. Organizations can act to shape the transformation.

- Tech workers—being so close to AI-driven changes—are the first to be affected. The evolution of their work serves as a model for changes across job functions.
- Most tech organizations are still pursuing early-stage, tool-based AI adoption. A smaller group is moving into workflow transformation. The next horizon is agent-led orchestration, where AI takes on end-to-end execution and humans steer strategy and oversight.
- What feels advanced today will be table stakes by 2030—if not before. To stay ahead, organizations must know where they stand now and act accordingly.

Workplaces everywhere have onboarded AI, from general-purpose tools such as ChatGPT to enterprise resource planning integrations and specialized solutions. Now, they must confront changes that are coming from within the organization. How does AI change the tasks workers undertake, the talent companies need, and the ways teams interact?

Tech workers—being so close to AI-driven changes—are the first to be affected. The evolution of their work serves as a model for changes across job functions, opening a broad window into the future of work across occupations. Today, companies are growing into AI maturity, beginning with adoption of tools and evolving to agent-led orchestration (in which autonomous AI agents handle complex, end-to-end tasks such as coding, testing, analysis—with human oversight). As they do so, companies are grappling with how to develop a workforce strategy that taps the best of people and technology.

Software Engineering: How Tasks, Talent, and Teams Will Change

AI Maturity

	Tool-based adoption	Workflow transformation	Agent-led orchestration
Tasks	Humans **lead coding;** AI builds scaffolds but **output needs human oversight**	**AI generates** production-level output; **humans shift** to co-creation with AI guidance	Agentic AI supports **end-to-end coding, testing, and deployment;** humans focus on system design and agent orchestration
Talent	Coding and algorithm skills remain table stakes; engineers master **AI tools** and prompt engineering	**Adaptability and versatility** skills needed as engineers' scope broadens to QA, DevOps, and infrastructure	**Premium on systems thinking** and critical thinking skills; **orchestration** of multiagent systems becomes table stakes
Teams	**Team structures stable**—juniors complete routine tasks faster and support adjacent teams; **middle management shifts** as coordination load reduces	**Team sizes shrink; pyramid compresses** as responsibilities increase	**Ultra-flat, cross-functional pods** for increased agility; **pyramid flattens** as agents take on routine coordination and execution

Sources: Expert interviews, BCG analysis.

UI/UX: How Tasks, Talent, and Teams Will Change

AI Maturity

	Tool-based adoption	Workflow transformation	Agent-led orchestration
Tasks	AI aids early-stage ideation and prototyping, enabling **faster concept validation**	Designers and AI **co-create flows** and interactions end-to-end from ideation to usability testing	Designers shape, **AI-supported experiences**—anchoring brand voice and emotional nuance
Talent	**Design and creative skills still needed;** fluency with AI tools increasingly important	Designers become **strategists** who iterate rapidly and align with business objectives	Demand for **AI experience architects:** experts in design nuance, creativity, and AI standard setting
Teams	**Team structures unchanged;** AI boosts individual output	**AI absorbs routine design operations,** allowing leaner human teams to handle end-to-end flows	Designers, PMs, and AI agents collaborate in **cross-functional pods** to deliver human-centered experiences

Sources: Expert interviews, BCG analysis.
Note: PMs = product managers. UI = user interface. UX = user experience.

Product Management: How Tasks, Talent, and Teams Will Change

AI Maturity

	Tool-based adoption	Workflow transformation	Agent-led orchestration
Tasks	Workflows still initiated by humans; **AI accelerates PRD drafting, backlog prep, and research**	**Human/AI co-creation standard;** tasks like spec writing, roadmap updates, and feedback synthesis shift to AI	Agents support execution loops; **humans focus on strategy, ethics, and scenario planning**
Talent	**Prompting, AI output validation, and tool fluency** join core skills like empathy and prioritization	**Human execution shifts to oversight,** emphasizing judgment, escalation logic, and tradeoff decisions	PMs **orchestrate AI-human teams,** relying on strategic thinking, AI fluency, and ethical guardrail setting
Teams	Team **structures mostly intact;** AI boosts individual productivity and **creates new handoffs and dependencies**	**Coordination layers thin and domain boundaries blur** as cross-functional pods rely on embedded AI	**Hybrid teams operate continuously;** AI-agents support traditional entry-level PM tasks, enabling talent to shift into higher-impact roles

Sources: Expert interviews; BCG analysis.
Note: PRD = product requirements document. PMs = product managers.

Data Science: How Tasks, Talent, and Teams Will Change

AI Maturity

	Tool-based adoption	Workflow transformation	Agent-led orchestration
Tasks	AI handles querying, summarization, and support coding; data scientists focus on **insight generation**	AI preps and analyzes data; humans **frame questions, structure insights, and guide strategy**	AI agents run analyses, detect anomalies, and generate predictive insights autonomously; humans bring **oversight, prompting, and exception handling**
Talent	Data scientists shift building dashboards to becoming **AI-augmented analysts,** focusing on prompting, validation, and iteration	Emphasis on **generalists with cross-functional skills** such as analytical depth and product context	Across contexts, **T-shaped leaders orchestrate** prompts and agents and validate AI models and paths to insight
Teams	Team structures unchanged; **entry-level hiring narrows** to focus on experienced or specialist candidates (e.g., PhDs, LLM experts)	Org shape remains **constant or widens near top** as companies **boost experienced DS capacity** to facilitate AI capabilities; entry-level hiring narrows for **more AI-fluent profiles**	Increasing reliance on experienced leaders to oversee AI-driven workflows; roles **diversify toward applied science, data engineering, architecture, and strategy**

Sources: Expert interviews, BCG analysis.
Note: T-shape = individuals with deep expertise in areas like statistical modeling or machine learning (the vertical bar of the “T”), combined with broad fluency across applied science, data engineering, business strategy, and AI prompting (the horizontal bar). Org = organization. DS = data scientist.

Quality Assurance: How Tasks, Talent, and Teams Will Change

AI Maturity

	Tool-based adoption	Workflow transformation	Agent-led orchestration
Tasks	AI generates **test scripts, sample data, and logs,** while humans lead **exploratory, user acceptance, and functional UI** testing	AI drives most testing creation and execution; **humans contribute to planning, systems, and edge cases**	AI agents **generate, execute, and repair test flows;** humans step in only for ambiguous results or high-risk cases
Talent	AI-assisted testers apply QA know-how and **skills in prompt design,** test script evaluation, and AI tooling	Focus is on **test strategy and guiding** how teams define and manage coverage—not on executing tests	Oversight roles focus on setting **quality policies, guiding automated test systems,** and ensuring safe outcomes
Teams	Teams stay intact, though **devs increasingly own** unit, integration, and API testing; headcount stalls as individual **productivity rises**	**QA team size may shift** as AI boosts throughput; some orgs **may expand temporarily** to manage GenAI testing demands (e.g., UAT, AI validation)	QA becomes **a distributed, continuous function** embedded across development workflows

Sources: Expert interviews; BCG analysis.
Note: UI = user interface testing. Devs = developers. API = application programming interface. Orgs = organizations. UAT = User acceptance testing.

Our interviews with AI-native leaders, our client experience, and job market data demonstrate that major, AI-driven shifts in work are underway. Specifically:

- **Work is being redefined.** AI is taking over execution and freeing human teams to focus on strategy, design, and oversight.
- **Roles are broadening and blending.** Functional lines are disappearing.
- **Teams and organizations are restructuring.** Traditional pyramids are giving way to flatter, AI-augmented pods, redefining the need for junior, coordinator, and manager roles.
- **Skills are shifting.** Fluency in AI is becoming essential across roles, alongside systems thinking, problem framing, and sound judgment.
- **Being open to AI distinguishes leaders.** Early movers aren't just adopting tools, they're investing in workforce readiness, communication, and cultural alignment.

Still, organizations have an opportunity to shape the transformation, as we explore here.

No Time to Wait

For tech workers, our harbingers of change in the workplace, the future isn't evolving gradually. Change is happening fast: in just the past year, leading tech organizations have moved quickly to adapt their talent models for an AI-first world.

The shift is driven not by one breakthrough but by a relentless wave of new tools and platforms, each pushing teams to rethink how work gets done and who does it. These shifts aren't just about efficiency. They reflect a deeper transformation that is in motion: roles are being redefined, layers streamlined, and hiring strategies rewritten to prioritize AI fluency. In many cases, work is being redistributed, not eliminated, as teams find new ways to integrate AI into daily execution and value creation.

Here are some real-life examples of how various tech roles are changing as AI matures:

- Software engineers are focusing more on the "why" and "what," rather than the "how."
- User interface and user experience designers are becoming architects of AI-powered products, continuing to add the human touch.
- Product managers are evolving into strategists by automating administrative tasks and shifting how they plan, prioritize, and engage with teams.
- Data scientists are seeing a new pathway, from entry level to high-level and strategic questioning and oversight.
- Quality assurance workers are moving away from execution toward intelligent oversight of the agents that drive testing workflows.

A Framework for Understanding the Evolving Workforce

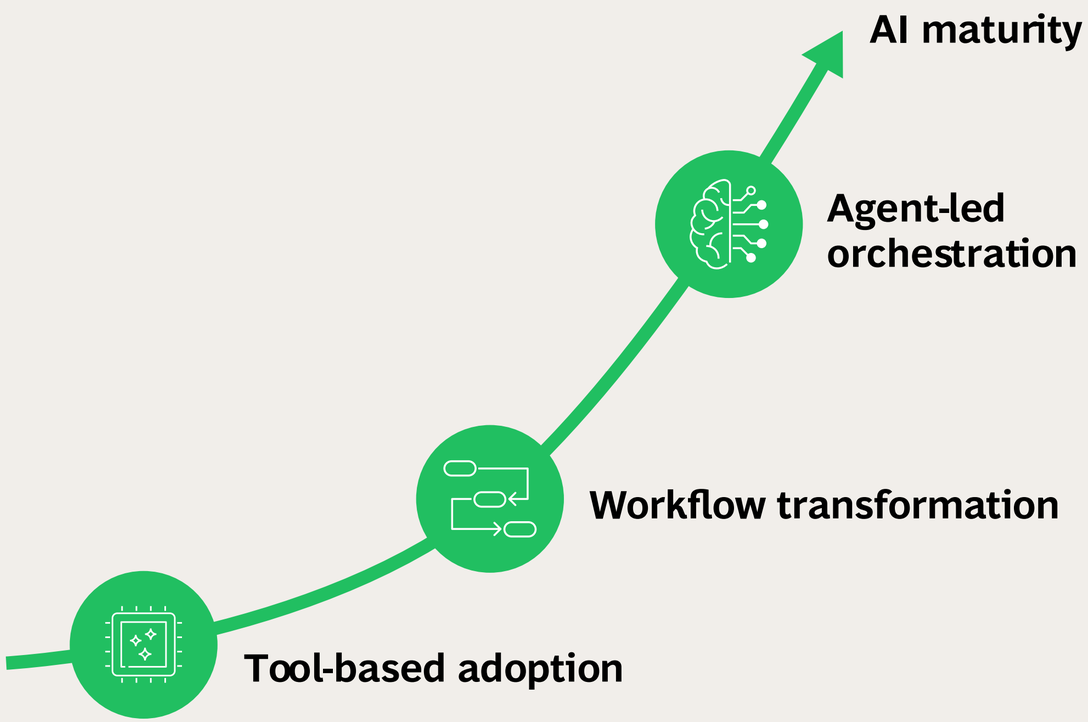
To help leaders navigate this transformation at scale, we developed the AI Talent Horizon Framework. It’s built on two key dimensions:

- **AI Maturity.** It progresses from tool-based adoption by individuals, to workflow transformation, to full, agent-led orchestration. Most organizations, and even teams within them, operate across multiple stages at once, not in a linear path.

- **Workforce Impact.** This spans how tasks are executed, to what skills are needed, to how teams are structured, to how organizational culture must evolve to support new ways of working.

The Two Dimensions of the AI Talent Horizon Framework

Stage of AI adoption



Impact on tasks, talent, and teams

Change in Tasks

The **tasks, processes, and workflows** that define how work gets done

Change in Talent

The **skills, roles, responsibilities, and capabilities** required from individuals

Change in Teams

The **structure, shape, and culture** of teams and talent models at scale

Sources: Expert interviews; BCG analysis.

Most tech organizations today remain in the early stages of the AI maturity curve. Tool-based adoption, where individuals use AI to boost speed and reduce repetition, is still the norm. A smaller group is moving into workflow transformation, embedding AI into team processes and shifting tasks toward co-creation. The next horizon is agent-led orchestration, where AI takes on end-to-end execution and humans steer strategy and oversight.

In each stage of AI maturity, the shifts for tasks, talent, and teams are significant:

- **Tasks** move from manual execution to intelligent orchestration, with AI taking on routine tasks and humans focusing on design, decision making, and oversight.

- **Talent** evolves such that workers' roles combine new sets of tasks—guiding AI, framing the right problems, validating outputs, and coordinating across systems. Success increasingly depends on judgment, systems thinking, and the ability to direct machines, not just do the work.

- **Teams** flatten, moving away from layered hierarchies toward hybrid teams that comprise humans and AI. Traditional pyramids give way to agile pods where senior talent and AI collaborate directly to deliver outcomes.

This isn't a matter of *whether* teams will evolve. It's *how fast* and *how intentionally* executives lead them to full AI maturity. The shift is essential to unlock enterprise-wide value from AI. If organizations don't reimagine tasks, talent and roles, and team structures, they risk capping the ROI of even the most advanced tools. Sustained—even exponential—impact is possible, but it requires not just adoption of AI but also alignment of the humans who guide, govern, and amplify it.

Trends to Watch

Seven trends are reshaping how work gets done, who does it, and how teams are structured. These shifts are accelerating, and they point toward a very different future just five years from now.

Work is being redefined and increasingly done by AI. AI now handles code scaffolding, documentation, and test generation, freeing humans to focus on system design and oversight. In one interview, a leader told us that (human) engineers now manage broader domains while AI tools handle routine output. As maturity grows, full workflows will shift to AI execution, with humans guiding, reviewing, and governing—not executing.

Roles are blending from function-based to fluid. Boundaries between engineering, product, and design are breaking down. Engineers validate AI-generated specs, product managers prototype with AI, and designers step into product-level tasks. One leader we talked with said that product managers now cover four to six times greater scope, spanning prototyping, prompt writing, and light quality assurance. Employees who combine hybrid skill sets with AI fluency are fast becoming the norm.

Skills are shifting and new baselines are forming. AI fluency, systems thinking, and adaptability are now must-haves. One company no longer tests for basic coding, instead evaluating how well candidates use AI tools to solve problems. Still, coding depth matters, especially for debugging and AI oversight. Certain human strengths—ethics, empathy, contextual judgment—are rising in value as AI takes on more execution.

Teams are flattening as AI becomes embedded. Support-heavy roles like technical product managers, quality assurance engineers, and sales development representatives are shrinking as AI handles execution. Organizations are shifting to cross-functional pods powered by AI assistants. One tech leader said that the company had replaced coordination layers with shared tools and copilots, phasing out certain coordination-heavy roles, such as technical product managers and product marketing managers, as their responsibilities are redistributed and supported by AI. As some roles become obsolete, companies are also redeploying talent to other departments and teams.

Rising expectations are reshaping entry-level pipelines. As AI automates routine tasks, new hires are expected to contribute at a higher level from day one. The executives we interviewed noted a growing gap between what schools produce and what AI-enabled roles demand. While employers have long carried the burden of upskilling, the pressure is intensifying. Without a more systemic response, organizations may face a prolonged readiness gap at the entry level.

Location strategy is being rethought as human work shifts to higher-value activities. AI is reshaping location strategy by automating routine execution work, pushing human roles toward earlier, higher-value activities like design, problem solving, and innovation. Global capability centers, once focused on transactional tasks and later core development, are now evolving into innovation hubs leading AI pilots and delivery. As skill needs change, the function of each location will be redefined to match new strategic priorities.

The talent race is heating up, and the market is unforgiving. Demand for AI-native talent is surging. Salaries for top tech talent are rising fast, and late movers are paying premiums to catch up. Several organizations are poaching from rivals to close gaps quickly. In tomorrow's hybrid teams, the edge goes to those who can lead AI.

Four Emerging Organization Archetypes and What They Mean for Leaders

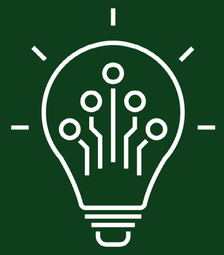
Organizations must react to these AI-driven trends. And they are. Some are cautiously experimenting whereas others are rebuilding from the ground up. Four distinct talent archetypes are emerging, each tied to a unique combination of strategic ambition and talent philosophy.

Four Distinct Organization Archetypes as AI Matures

BUILD FOR FUTURE

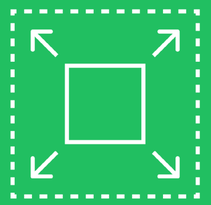
Strategic focus

OPTIMIZE THE NOW

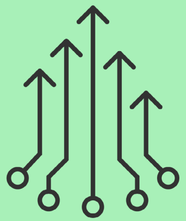


The Horizon Builder
Investing in AI to enable new capabilities while retaining structure to scale it

The Reinventor
Breaking down org silos to fully redesign teams and roles around AI systems



The Scaler
Driving productivity by layering AI onto intact role structures



The Streamliner
Collapsing layers and merging adjacent roles to reduce cost and complexity

PRESERVE ROLES

Talent philosophy

REIMAGINE THE MODEL

Sources: Expert interviews, BCG analysis.
Note: org = organization.

There is no one-size-fits-all playbook. Each archetype demands distinct action today to build enduring advantage. The right moves depend on where an organization sits—whether it's scaling GenAI within current structures, cautiously building new horizons, streamlining for speed, or reinventing itself. Organizations that move with clarity and speed will lead the next wave of AI-first transformation.

The Scaler. Scalers focus on throughput, embedding AI tools into existing workflows and expanding managers' spans without altering team structures. Some are already seeing measurable velocity gains and have begun reducing the product manager head count.

What leaders need to do now: Focus on execution at scale. Embed AI tools across functions—from engineering to quality assurance to product management—and codify clear usage guidelines. Retrain individual contributors to oversee output generated from AI, rather than try to have humans generate that output from scratch. Begin to flatten management layers, launch AI enablement hubs, and begin rewriting workflows to center on orchestration rather than task completion.

The Horizon Builder. Horizon builders invest heavily in AI while preserving traditional job ladders. They retrain from within and evolve through internal mobility, not reorganization.

What leaders need to do now: Take a test-and-expand approach. Pilot AI in safe zones (such as ticket triage and content operations), then scale successes. Begin bridging legacy roles to AI-enhanced ones through structured rotations, internal mobility, and shadowing. Upskill teams with foundational fluency and collaborative AI usage skills. Entry-level pipelines should evolve, not disappear: elevate expectations, and support early talent with intentional development tracks.

The Streamliner. Streamliners collapse roles, phase out coordination layers, and build lean pods. Product managers also design, and engineers self-validate their output with AI.

What leaders need to do now: Prioritize efficiency and focus. Redesign roles around hybrid skill sets. Clarify new responsibilities. Reduce redundant layers, collapse handoffs,

and build small, senior-led pods that fully integrate AI into daily delivery. Invest in learning programs tied to blended roles, and position HR as a strategic partner in rewiring the organization for speed.

The Reinventor. Reinventors are rebuilding from the ground up, introducing new roles like large-language-model (LLM) product managers and agent orchestrators, redesigning ladders, and making AI front and center in delivery.

What leaders need to do now: Move boldly. Redesign entire job families around AI-human teaming: think LLM product managers, agent quality assurance, and Prompt Ops. Begin to flatten the pyramid, create new job ladders that reflect AI orchestration, and establish pods that include AI. Secure hard-to-find, AI-native talent early, and upskill the rest fast. HR must be embedded at the front line of transformation, shaping new paths and policies in real time.

Where to Start

AI isn't just reshaping tools. It's redefining how businesses build, organize, and compete. And the archetypes we describe aren't just shifts in operating models. They are the foundations of long-term competitive advantage rooted in a deep embrace of AI. Adoption today isn't about dabbling. It's about building the roles, systems, and behaviors that will define an organization's edge in 2030 and beyond. Remember: what feels advanced today will be table stakes by 2030—if not before. To stay ahead, organizations must know where they stand now and act accordingly.

So, identify the archetype your organization most closely reflects. Use it as a lens to prioritize action, from role redesign to team rewiring to workforce planning. Then, move with intention. The next wave of advantage won't come from technology and task automation alone, but from how decisively leaders reimagine the talent and teams that power it.

We thank our BCG colleagues who helped to shape this work: Megan Mirabella, Auli Shen, Joe Khoury, Sambhav Jain, and Aditya Sharma. Special thanks to the leaders at AI-native and large tech organizations (including Vitaly Gordon of Faros AI and Surojit Chatterjee of Ema) who generously shared their insights through interviews and to the extended project team for their research, analysis, and thought partnership.

About the Authors

Julie Bedard is a managing director and partner in BCG's Boston office. You may contact her by email at **bedard.julie@bcg.com**.

Elizabeth Lucero is a partner in BCG's Boston office. You may contact her by email at **lucero.elizabeth@bcg.com**.

Ruth Ebeling is a managing director and partner in BCG's Austin office. You may contact her by email at **ebeling.ruth@bcg.com**.

Frank Breitling is a managing director and senior partner in BCG's New York office. You may contact him by email at **breitling.frank@bcg.com**.

Consuelo Garcia-Garcia is a project leader in BCG's New York office. You may contact her by email at **garciagarcia.consuelo@bcg.com**.

Ayush Sakhuja is a project leader in BCG's Pittsburgh office. You may contact him by email at **sakhuja.ayush@bcg.com**.

Boston Consulting Group

Boston Consulting Group partners with leaders in business and society to tackle their most important challenges and capture their greatest opportunities. BCG was the pioneer in business strategy when it was founded in 1963. Today, we work closely with clients to embrace a transformational approach aimed at benefiting all stakeholders—empowering organizations to grow, build sustainable competitive advantage, and drive positive societal impact.

Our diverse, global teams bring deep industry and functional expertise and a range of perspectives that question the status quo and spark change. BCG delivers solutions through leading-edge management consulting, technology and design, and corporate and digital ventures. We work in a uniquely collaborative model across the firm and throughout all levels of the client organization, fueled by the goal of helping our clients thrive and enabling them to make the world a better place.