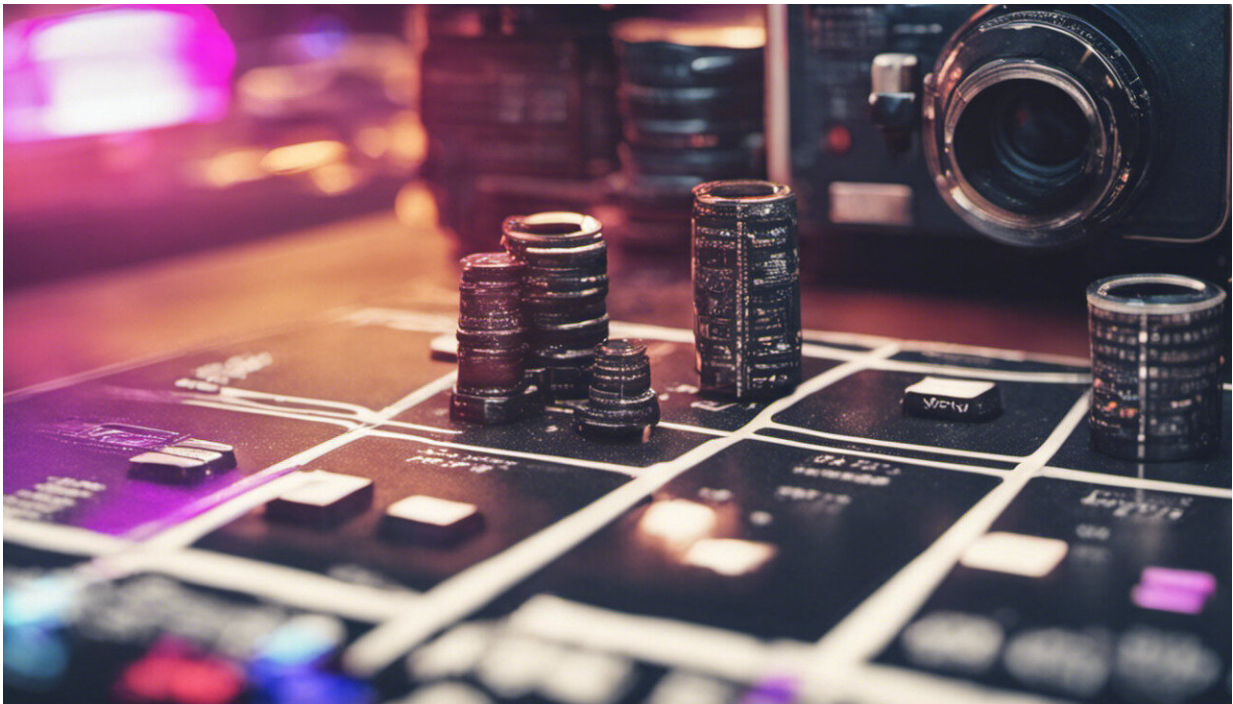


# How you can future-proof your career in the era of AI

July 31 2023, by Elisabeth Kelan

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Ever since the industrial revolution, people have feared that technology would take away their jobs. While some jobs and tasks have indeed been replaced by machines, others have [emerged](#). The success of ChatGPT and other generative artificial intelligence (AI) now has many people wondering about the future of work—and whether their jobs are safe.

A [recent poll](#) found that more than half of people aged 18–24 are worried about AI and their careers. The fear that jobs might disappear or be replaced through automation is understandable. Recent [research](#) found that a quarter of tasks that humans currently do in the US and Europe could be automated in the coming years.

The increased use of AI in white-collar workplaces means the changes will be different to previous [workplace transformations](#). That's because, the thinking goes, middle-class jobs are now under [threat](#).

The future of work is a popular topic of discussion, with countless books published each year on the topic. These books speak to the human need to understand how the future might be shaped.

I [analyzed 10 books](#) published between 2017 and 2020 that focused on the future of work and technology. From this research, I found that thinking about AI in the workplace generally falls into two camps. One is expressed as concern about the future of work and security of current roles—I call this sentiment "automation anxiety." The other is the hope that humans and machines collaborate and thereby increase productivity—I call this "augmentation aspiration."

## **Anxiety and aspiration**

I found a strong theme of concern in these books about technology enabling certain tasks to be automated, depriving many people of jobs. Specifically, the concern is that knowledge-based jobs—like those in accounting or law—that have long been regarded as the purview of well-educated professionals are now under threat of replacement by machines.

Automation undermines the idea that a good education will secure a good middle-class job. As economist Richard Baldwin points out in his

2019 book, [The Globotics Upheaval](#), if you've invested a significant amount of money and time on a law degree—thinking it is a skill set that will keep you permanently employable—seeing AI complete tasks that a junior lawyer would normally be doing, at less cost, is going to be worrisome.

But there is another, more aspirational way to think about this. Some books stress the potential of humans [collaborating](#) with AI, to augment each other's skills. This could mean working with robots in factories, but it could also mean using an AI chatbot when practicing [law](#). Rather than being replaced, lawyers would then be augmented by technology.

In reality, automation and augmentation [co-exist](#). For your future [career](#), both will be relevant.

## **Future-proofing yourself**

As you think about your own career, the first step is to realize that some automation of tasks is most likely going to be something you'll have to contend with in the future.

In light of this, learning is one of the most important ways you can future-proof your career. But should you spend money on further education if the return on investment is uncertain?

It is true that specific skills risk becoming outdated as technology develops. However, more than learning specific abilities, education is about learning how to learn—that is, how to update your skills throughout your career. Research shows that having the ability to do so is highly [valuable](#) at work.

This learning can take place in [educational settings](#), by going back to university or participating in an executive education course, but it can

also happen [on the job](#). In any discussion about your career, such as with your manager, you might want to raise which additional training you could do.

Critical thinking and analytical skills are going to be particularly central for how humans and machines can augment one another. When working with a machine, you need to be able to question the output that is produced. Humans are probably always going to be central to this—you might have a [chatbot](#) that automates parts of legal work, but a human will still be needed to make sense of it all.

Finally, remember that when people previously feared jobs would disappear and tasks would be replaced by machines, this was not necessarily the case. For instance, the introduction of automated teller machines (ATMs) did not eliminate bank tellers, but it did [change their tasks](#).

Above all, choose a job that you enjoy and keep learning—so that if you do need to change course in the [future](#), you know how to.

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