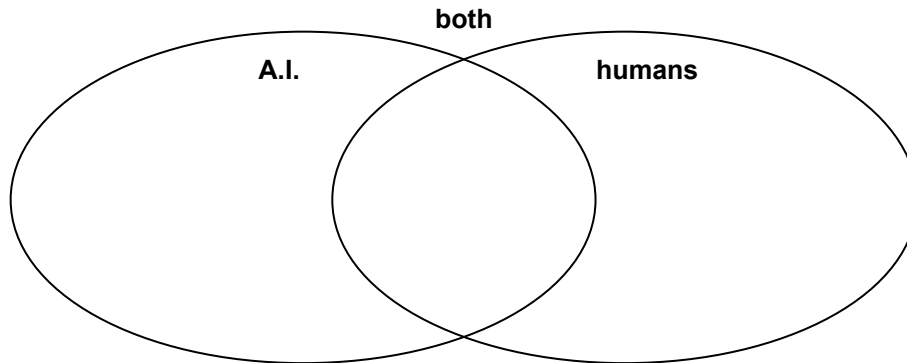


Will AI free us from drudgery – or leave us jobless and hungry?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

- a. What are some jobs that can be done entirely by A.I. or machines? What jobs can be done by humans only? What are some that can be done by both? Fill in the Venn diagram.



- b. Discuss your Venn diagram with a partner. Where do you agree? Where do you disagree?

2 Key words

- a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to match the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

algorithm automate bust chatbot experimentation
harness hype morale negotiation optimist
reassure scam sticking point trough unionise

1. a computer program that can have a conversation with a human _____
2. organise people to join a trade union or to become a member of a trade union

3. break something or stop it from working _____
4. discussion and adverts in the media telling people how good, important, or unique a product or service is _____
5. a low point, especially when a business or the economy is not growing _____
6. the process of trying many different things to see which one works or has the desired effect

7. the amount of confidence a person or group has at a particular time _____
8. a set of instructions or rules programmed into a computer that will calculate an answer to a problem _____

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9. change a process from one that is done by humans to one done by machines or computers

10. something that people disagree on, which slows or stops a decision or agreement

11. the process of discussing something with one or more people to reach an agreement

12. people who always believe that good things will happen _____
13. say or do something to make someone feel less scared or worried _____
14. a clever but dishonest plan that tricks people to make money _____
15. control something, usually as a way to use its power _____

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences. You may need to change the form of the word.

1. The dad _____ his three-year-old daughter that there were no monsters under her bed.
2. After the layoffs, _____ in the office was very low.
3. If you always see the glass as half-full, then you're a(n) _____.
4. Many companies use _____ for customer service, but I still prefer talking to a real person.
5. If you don't know the phone number of the person calling, be careful because it might be a(n) _____.
6. There are so many adverts for that new film, and everyone is talking about it. Do you think it's worth all the _____?
7. The economy goes through a series of ups and downs, also known as peaks and _____.
8. A search engine _____ is designed to find specific information and serve up a list of websites with the best results.
9. After the car accident, the front of his car was totally _____.
10. Have you finished the _____ with the couple who are buying your house?

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Artificial intelligence promises more leisure and creativity for workers. But at the same time, corporations are clamping down on unions and making plans to replace their expensive human employees

Arwa Mahdawi

30 May, 2023

- 1 Goodbye humans, hello “Tessa”. The US-based National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) is making headlines after getting rid of all its staff and replacing them with an AI-assisted chatbot called Tessa. This happened just four days after the six paid employees, who oversaw about 200 volunteers, successfully unionised. Coincidence? Oh, absolutely, NEDA said; it was a long-anticipated change that had nothing to do with unionisation. A blogpost written by a helpline associate begs to differ and calls the move “union busting, plain and simple”.
- 2 Is this a sign of bad things to come? Are we about to see millions of jobs wiped out as humans are replaced by AI assistants with female names? After stealing all of our jobs, are the Tessas of the world going to unionise and stage a digital takeover of Earth?
- 3 The short answer is: maybe. All emerging technology goes through the “Gartner hype cycle”; now, we’re at the inflated expectations and breathless predictions stage of that cycle and heading towards the “trough of disillusionment”, before things supposedly level out. I don’t think AI will lead to the end of civilisation as we know it in the near future. But I do think an awful lot of corporations are champing at the bit to replace as many expensive humans as they can with AI and will use the new technology as a way to clamp down on a recent wave of labour organising. In the next few years, I think we are going to see a lot of messy experimentation as companies rush to cut costs and bring their own “Tessas” to market.
- 4 Not everyone is admitting this, of course. It tends to be bad for employee morale when your boss is bragging about how many extra yachts they can buy when they replace you with an algorithm. IBM is one of the few companies sharing specifics about how many people AI might replace. In a recent interview, CEO Arvind Krishna said the technology company will pause hiring for “back-office jobs” in the coming years and automate those roles. “I could easily see 30 per cent of workers getting replaced by AI and automation over a five-year period,” Krishna told Bloomberg. That’s about 7,800 jobs.
- 5 What companies aren’t saying is also important. AI, and how it is used to create content, is a major sticking point in the Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike. The WGA wants to ensure protections are put in place to stop the big Hollywood studios from training algorithms on writers’ work and then replacing the bulk of its creatives with AI. “Based on what we’re aiming for in this contract, there couldn’t be a movie that was released by a company that we work with that had no writer,” screenwriter John August told Vox. The studios didn’t agree to this in negotiations that took place before the strike. Instead, they said they could have “annual meetings to discuss advancements in technology.” Which seems like code for: “We’re getting rid of as many as you as we possibly can ASAP.”
- 6 While all this sounds deeply depressing, there are lots of AI optimists eager to reassure us that artificial intelligence is actually going to make the world a better place. Yes, AI will replace some jobs, but it will also create better jobs. Technology will do all the boring work, and humans will have more free time to sit around writing poetry in the sun. Nobody is entirely sure how everyone will be able to feed themselves amid all this newfound leisure time, but “universal basic income” (UBI) gets thrown around a lot in this scenario. (UBI is a libertarian scam and will absolutely not save us, but that’s a topic for another day.)

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7 Jonah Peretti, the CEO of BuzzFeed, was one of these AI optimists. "We see the breakthroughs in AI opening up a new era of creativity that will allow humans to harness creativity in new ways with endless opportunities and applications for good," Peretti wrote in a memo to BuzzFeed employees in January. We all know what happened a few months later, don't we? BuzzFeed shut down its news division, dismissed a load of people and leaned more heavily into AI. There is certainly a lot of potential for AI to change the world for the better. I just don't think there's an appetite among the people at the top to use its potential that way.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Change the sentences so they are correct. Three of them are true and don't need to be corrected.

1. An organisation in the US got rid of half of its staff and replaced them with an app.
2. The staff at the organisation did not unionise successfully beforehand.
3. AI is at the “inflated expectations and breathless predictions” stage of the Gartner hype cycle.
4. The next stage in the Gartner hype cycle is when things level out.
5. The author thinks that AI will lead to the end of civilisation as we know it.
6. Companies are trying to replace expensive humans and slow labour-organization activities.
7. Tesla is one of the few companies sharing specifics about how many people AI might replace, and they estimated 20,000 jobs.
8. In recent negotiations, film studios in Hollywood agreed that movies could not be written without a human writer.
9. AI optimists claim that AI will make the world a better place.
10. BuzzFeed expanded its news division and hired lots of new staff after it started using more AI.

4 Key language

a. Match the expressions to their definitions.

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. beg to differ | a. very eager to do something |
| 2. wipe out | b. remove a person or thing from your surroundings |
| 3. level out | c. stop rising or falling and stay at an even level |
| 4. champing at the bit | d. get rid of something completely |
| 5. clamp down on | e. (of an idea or plan) discussed in a back-and-forth way |
| 6. get rid of | f. a way to politely disagree with someone or something |
| 7. get thrown around | g. decide to do something difficult and try to do it well |
| 8. lean into | h. take strong action to stop or limit something harmful or unwanted |

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b. Complete the sentences with the expressions above. You may need to change the form of the word.

1. We're moving soon, so it's time to clean out the cupboards and _____ stuff.
2. The recent bird flu epidemic _____ huge numbers of chickens.
3. After the training, she really _____ her new role as manager.
4. As soon as we arrived at the amusement park, the kids were _____ to go on the roller coasters.
5. I know you think that team will win the finals, but I _____.
6. The term "artificial intelligence" _____ a lot, but how many people understand what's happening in that field?
7. Teachers have had to _____ on students using their phones during class.
8. There have been a lot of changes to the company lately, but things seem to be _____ now.

c. Write four sentences using the expressions above.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "We should embrace AI because it will bring many positives."
- "Humans need to put laws and restrictions in place to protect themselves from AI now and in the future."
- "In ten years, the kinds of jobs available for humans will be very different."

6 In your own words

a. Imagine you are a CEO considering replacing some of your staff with AI.

- Decide what industry you work in.
- What questions do you have about the use of AI?
- What kinds of jobs would you replace?
- What new jobs for humans would you need?
- What are the pros and cons?

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Use an internet search engine to find more information about AI applications in your chosen industry.

- b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinion about the issue. Here are some phrases to help you.

I'm in favour of/against...

An advantage/disadvantage is ...

One reason I support ...

One reason I'm opposed to ...

An upside/downside is ...

One plus/minus is ...

A positive/negative is ...

An argument for/against this is ...

The main benefit / A significant drawback is ...