What Happens When Work is No Longer Tied to Jobs?

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What is a job, actually?

A marketing manager researches markets, analyzes competition, drafts messaging and coordinates a campaign. A financial analyst gathers data, builds models, prepares forecasts and delivers a plan. Different domains. Same structure. All of those tasks have to come together somewhere to produce an outcome. That somewhere has always been a person in a job. The job is the integration point.

AI changes that.

When systems can perform research, analysis, drafting and coordination across domains — maintain context and integrate outputs continuously — the job is no longer required to be the integration point. Activities that were bundled inside a job because a human needed to hold them together can now be orchestrated as shared capabilities across an enterprise.

This is not a fringe idea. Ravin Jesuthasan and John W. Boudreau made the case for deconstructing jobs into tasks and skills in their book, Work without Jobs. ADP and the

Stanford Digital Economy Lab are now measuring the economic value of discrete tasks within jobs using payroll data and presented their findings at Davos this January. The evidence that jobs are decomposable is building. But the real question is not how to decompose jobs. It is what happens to work once the job is no longer the container.

Learning from History

Before the electric grid, every machine had to carry its own fuel and its own way of converting that fuel into energy. An oil lamp stored oil and burned it to make light. A wood stove stored wood and transformed it to make heat. A steam-powered loom carried coal and converted it to mechanical motion. The fuel, the energy conversion and the rest of the "work" all lived inside the machine.

Then the grid separated energy from the machine. Once you could plug anything into a wall and get power on demand, each device no longer needed its own energy system. That single change made the refrigerator possible, the washing machine, the vacuum cleaner, the espresso maker. These were not improvements on oil lamps or wood stoves. They were entirely new machines that emerged once energy was decoupled. It's the decoupling that drove an explosion of innovation, productivity and entirely new categories of devices.

Now apply this to knowledge work. The job has been the machine. It bundles together activities, skills, context and integration needed to produce an outcome. Enter AI, and it now becomes the grid for knowledge work. Research, analysis, coordination and synthesis can now be delivered on demand across the enterprise and so work no longer has to live inside the job, just as fuel no longer had to live inside the machine.

A Structural Shift Under Way

Calling AI a tool is like calling the electric grid a better candle. It misses the category of change entirely. AI is not just making existing jobs faster. It is making the job optional as the unit of integration.

Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index points in this direction. Its "Frontier Firms" are already restructuring around AI as a system capability, replacing fixed org charts with fluid teams that assemble around outcomes. That is not a tool being adopted. That is infrastructure reshaping how work gets organized.

Will some jobs disappear? Of course they will. The ongoing debate about this is a distraction from the more important question. The augmentation vs. replacement framing also misses the larger point. AI will replace some work. It will augment other work. But the bigger story is the work that becomes possible for the first time.

Today, analysis lives inside functional jobs — marketing analysis in marketing, financial analysis in finance. Each shaped by the function it sits in, not by the decision it serves. Once analysis becomes a shared enterprise capability, the role that emerges looks less like "analyst in a function" and more like a decision architect — someone who defines the outcome, configures

the system and owns the judgment. That role does not exist today because the structure made it impossible. Multiply that across every knowledge work activity.

The Future of Work

We are heading toward an explosion of new roles, new structures and new ways of organizing work that have not yet been defined.

There is a lot of discussion about reskilling. Very critical, but reskilling for what? We cannot reskill people for roles that the current structure of work makes difficult to define. Deloitte's research on skills-based organizations is a step in the right direction, but skills only become meaningful once work has been unbundled and new roles take shape.

So, the question for boards and enterprise leaders is not which jobs AI will replace. It is what organizational design and necessary skills look like in a world where work is no longer bundled the way it used to be. The companies that get this right will define the next era. The rest will have perfectly designed organizations around a construct that no longer exists.