Quote by Charu Malhotra, Co-founder and Managing Director, Primus Partners

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AI is not here to steal your job; it's creating new roles with lucrative pay

The modern-day tech job needs AI skills, and companies are overhauling their hiring strategies to focus on AI competencies. However, is the modern-day techie ready to meet this new demand?

Authored by Bhuvana Kamath

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Article Content:

Humans built the concept of jobs. Then, they built artificial intelligence (AI) to make their tasks easier. A few years later, OpenAI introduced its revolutionary generative AI feature— ChatGPT— and the world has never been the same.

With the advent of many AI applications, humans feared losing their jobs as companies started implementing the technology to streamline their tasks. However, that's not the case entirely.

Zoho Corp boss Sridhar Vembu believes AI will bring a 'renaissance of traditional roles', offering better wages to local communities.

Companies are hiring for roles that didn't exist before—AI trainers, ethical AI architects, and Chief AI Officers at the C-suite level—which require new skills and pay a premium salary compared to a normal tech job.

For instance, 25-year-old Akash*—a mid-career software engineer at a Bengaluru healthcare startup—felt unprepared when his company started focusing on AI-driven projects. “I knew my existing skills wouldn’t cut it anymore.”

Soon, he enrolled in an AI specialisation course after speaking to his friends working in big tech firms about upskilling. In a few months, Akash was integrating machine learning (ML)and other models into his projects.

“Upskilling was daunting, but it was the best decision. The market wasn’t in good shape, and switching jobs during that period was tough. I could barely pass the qualifying tests. I had to upskill to stay afloat and get better at what I was doing,” he says.

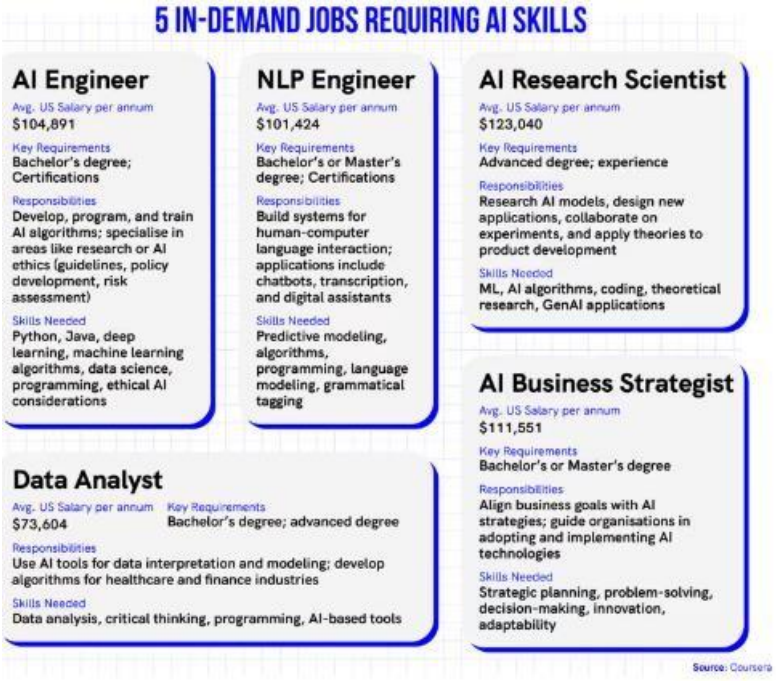
This is the story of many professionals in India in the age of AI—where AI-based skills have taken centre stage as companies revamp their hiring process to focus on certain skills and competencies.

According to Gartner, about 80% of the engineering workforce will need to upskill due to AI’s growing influence by 2027. Similarly, LinkedIn projects that 65% of job skills will change by 2030.

Jaideep Kewalramani, COO and Head of Employability Business of TeamLease Edtech, believes the demand for AI professionals will increase exponentially over the next five years, growing at a CAGR of 30%-100%, depending on the job role.

He says, “It will be primarily driven by the fact that AI will become all pervasive across industries and roles. Niche roles like AI ethics specialists, regulatory compliance officers, governance, and safety roles will also be in demand.”

According to Salesforce, roles like AI trainer, sentiment analyser, AI instructor, AI compliance manager, and others are some of the hottest roles in demand.



New skills for new roles

Milind Shah, Managing Director of Randstad Digital India, says the net impact of AI on employment will likely be a shift in job roles with more emphasis on high-skill positions,

including data scientists, AI engineers, and AI product managers, necessitating significant reskilling efforts.

Companies can address this shift by implementing internal learning initiatives while fostering soft skills like adaptability and problem-solving. Partnerships with edtech platforms and universities, too, can ensure employees gain practical job-ready expertise.

Earlier this year, Cisco, Accenture, Eightfold, Google, IBM, Indeed, Intel, Microsoft, and SAP Labs launched the AI-Enabled Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Workforce Consortium to upskill professionals with AI.

The initiative identifies roles most likely to be impacted by AI, facilitates upskilling and reskilling opportunities for workers, and connects businesses with job-ready talent. Meanwhile, specialised AI roles require a blend of technical and analytical skills and an understanding of AI ethics and human-machine interaction.

For example, prompt engineers need a strong grasp of natural language processing, how AI models are built and refined, and the ability to create training data for AI systems. AI trainers focus on building data sets, refining AI algorithms, and ensuring AI systems learn efficiently. And having the right skills for specific roles is a must.

Aditya—a frontend developer at an American tech firm—says his role focuses on creating user-friendly interfaces, primarily consuming AI and ML models rather than directly working with them.

"Recently, I attended an AI workshop from AWS on its product SageMaker, designed for ML on the cloud. While the workshop was helpful, it focused on backend workflows... I couldn't see much relevance to my daily tasks as a frontend developer," he says.

Agreeing, Ajay Trehan, Founder and CEO of AuthBridge, tells YourStory, “When it comes to upskilling and reskilling employees to keep pace with AI advancements, companies must adopt a proactive and structured approach to ensure their workforce is not only prepared for the future but also empowered to excel alongside AI.”

Bring your own AI

Today, AI literacy is as essential as traditional learning and will include how employees work with AI tools, says tech strategist Jaspreet Bindra, Co-founder of AI&Beyond. “Not long ago, literacy was about reading, writing, and arithmetic... (AI literacy) now goes beyond training or skilling—it’s about basic literacy in tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude.

Employees need to know how to use these tools, write effective prompts, ensure data privacy, and get the best outcomes," Bindra explains. If one looks at the recent trend of 'Bring Your Own AI'—similar to 'Bring Your Own Device'—a Microsoft LinkedIn report suggests that 80% of employees bring their own AI tools to work.

A few popular AI tools, according to a report by Microsoft and LinkedIn titled 2024 Work Trend Index Annual Report, are Bard, Microsoft Copilot, Grammarly, Claude, and Gemini. "Employees are keen to get skilled, and 66% of managers won't hire unless candidates are AI literate and can use these tools for productivity and innovation," Bindra adds.

This new-age technology is also redefining roles in customer experience (CX), where AI frees employees from repetitive tasks, allowing them to build cross-functional knowledge in sales and service, says Maureen Chong, Regional Vice President - Asia, Zendesk.

"In the CX industry, the roles of agents, admins, and CX leaders will shift... They will partner with AI copilots to respond faster to business challenges and improve efficiency," says Chong.

Lucrative offers and salary trends

With AI tech expertise comes higher salaries, and companies are not shying away from gettingyou the remuneration. According to Level.fyi—an organisation that tracks salary trends—the median salary for AI software engineers in the US is $300,000, almost $100,000 higher than non-AI engineers.

In India, professionals with niche AI skills earn 15-20% more than those with traditional tech expertise, says Shah. High-level roles like AI chief officers and data science leads can command salaries 20-40% higher than conventional IT roles. Non-tech professionals, too, are cashing in on the trend. For example, Kartik Jolapara—with a non-computer science degree from a Tier III college—landed a senior software engineer role at JP Morgan with a Rs 1.64 crore first-year package—all thanks to his AI skills.

Charu Malhotra, Co-founder and Managing Director of Primus Partners, predicts these salary premiums will continue to rise as companies seek specialised talent. "Positions like AI engineers, ML specialists, and data scientists often earn a premium with salaries 20-40% higher than traditional software developers or IT professionals," Malhotra says. According to him, job creation will depend on the availability of skilled talent, making it imperative for educational institutions to incorporate not just AI but 12 other emerging technologies—IoT, robotics, AR/VR, ML, Big Data, data analytics, cloud computing, cybersecurity, blockchain, Metaverse, Web 3.0, and 3D modelling— in the next five years.

Lucrative offers or not, engineers are presently struggling to keep up with the AI hype. While studies suggest that nearly 40% of jobs may be affected by automation, AI experts like Deepak Sekar believe it won’t result in massive job losses. “Preparing for the AI era requires a commitment to learning key skills such as language proficiency, mathematics, and AI literacy,” he adds.

An engineer at TCS says, "We were all asked to go through AI courses and pass a test to upskill ourselves. Management says it's to keep us updated. But honestly, I can't help but feelthat AI will eventually replace what I'm doing—it's just a matter of time.”

*Name changed on request. (Infographics and featured image by Nihar Apte)
Edited by Suman Singh