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Big Tech Has Suddenly Flipped on the AI Jobs Wipeout Scenario

As public opinion of AI shifts into negative, warnings of mass employment reductions diminish

By Katherine Bindley
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OpenAI CEO Sam Altman says the industry 'underestimated how much we're going to be able to keep people at the center of everything.' NATHAN LAINE/BLOOMBERG NEWS

Quick Summary

- Business leaders have shifted their public stance on AI's impact, now emphasizing job creation and productivity boosts over job elimination.
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A year ago, the message from many business leaders was that AI was going to wipe out jobs. For the past month or so, tech CEOs have been striking a more optimistic tone.

In late May, OpenAI Chief Executive Sam Altman—who has long predicted that AI will lead to seismic shifts in the workforce—said during a conference, "We've been roughly right on technological predictions and pretty wrong on the social and economic implications."

Soon after, he told CNBC, "Our industry underestimated how much we're going to be able to keep people at the center of everything."

Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei, who warned in May 2025 that artificial intelligence could eliminate half of entry-level jobs, a year later highlighted more-positive scenarios for AI-adopting businesses: "They can do the same thing with less resources, and that leads to things like layoffs, or they can do more with the same amount of resources. But that requires creativity."

In a June essay, the executive wrote that in giving warnings of job displacement, he wanted policymakers and the private sector to have the best chance at adapting—he wasn't trying to be a "prophet of doom." (He also wrote that the possibility of "enduring job loss" remains.)

Is the sunnier outlook a move to win back customers and the public who are souring on AI's world-upending promise? Or is the role of AI in the workplace now just better understood?

Some comments about AI's potential to create jobs are coming amid layoffs intended to funnel more money to AI spending. Meta Platforms CEO Mark Zuckerberg recently said in an interview with Complex that if businesses focus on making people more productive at a faster rate than automation, "in theory there should be more jobs in the future, not less." In May, the company started laying off 8,000 workers, flattening teams.

In February, Amazon.com CEO Andy Jassy spoke of AI's job-creating potential in an interview on CNBC. A year ago, he announced that the company would reduce head count in the coming years because of AI. Amazon has said the subsequent layoffs of 16,000 workers weren't related to AI adoption, but to the continuing effort to reduce layers and reinvigorate company culture.

Collectively, the narrative has shifted from worker-light doomsday scenarios caused by AI to a future in which workers keep their jobs—and get a productivity boost.

Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei has warned of AI-related job displacement, but in a recent essay said he wasn't trying to be a 'prophet of doom.'

The sentiment change isn't limited to tech leaders: A survey by EY-Parthenon found that the percentage of CEOs who believe AI investments will result in significant reductions in head count fell from around 46% in January 2025 to 20% this May.

"They may have noticed that the labor market is genuinely not changing (i.e., imploding) as rapidly as they expected," said David Autor, a professor of economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "They may have realized it was simply bad business to say that your great new product will destroy the economy."

One recent study by financial-technology company Ramp and workforce-intelligence firm Revelio Labs found that companies making the largest AI investments grew employment by roughly 10% more than otherwise similar companies that hadn't yet adopted AI.

"The companies that I know that have adopted AI the most are also the ones hiring the most," Altman said in the CNBC interview. AI is even creating new demand for certain jobs, and more will come that don't yet exist, some tech leaders say.

Many of the world's most prominent economists disagree on AI's long-term impact on jobs.

Ford Motor CEO Jim Farley said last year AI would replace "literally half of all white-collar workers in the U.S." The company recently hired several hundred engineers and attributed the move to concerns over the quality of work that had been automated. (The hirings were earlier reported by Bloomberg.)

"Engineers with deep technical expertise leveraging the power of AI is a powerful combination that is driving quality gains at Ford," a Ford spokesman said.

Ford, led by CEO Jim Farley, recently hired several hundred engineers over concerns about work that had been automated. AARON M. SPRECHER/BLOOMBERG NEWS

Meanwhile, negative public sentiment about AI has been building. Around 30% of Democrats think America should accelerate AI innovation as fast as possible, compared with roughly half of Republicans and 77% of tech founders, according to a recent poll by researchers at Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley.

"The tenor of the conversation has changed," said Maurice Schweitzer, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School who researches leadership and decision-making. “There was a lot of early hype.”

Between efforts to build data centers and the potential for government regulations around AI, “there’s a political component to what they’re trying to do,” he said.

Then there is how AI is actually performing in businesses. Companies in tech and beyond are learning how long it can take to effectively implement new AI tools and working to better understand how well it handles tasks and workflows.

Companies have a hard time telling which of their AI investments are panning out, according to a survey of corporate executives conducted by the technology and management-consulting firm Emergn. Around 20% of U.S. leaders said the AI deployment reports they receive paint a rosier picture than the facts support, with some reporting “softened” bad news and staff keeping quiet about failures.

It might sound nice on an earnings call when a CEO says what AI is capable of and the type of returns to expect, according to Stephen Henriques, a senior research fellow with the Yale Chief Executive Leadership Institute. “How it actually gets spread throughout the economy is a really different story,” he said.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has a history of predicting that AI will create new jobs. In June, he went so far as to say AI could lead to a labor shortage. When asked on CNBC in May about people being afraid of AI taking jobs, he said the reason they were afraid was because “all these smart people keep saying that.”

Fewer people are saying it now.

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