Cognizant and Oxford Economics Study Predicts Impact of Gen AI on Women at Work

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The impact of generative AI (gen AI) on jobs is expected to be transformative, but new study findings from Cognizant and Oxford Economics announced today predict one workforce demographic will be particularly exposed to disruption: women.

Cognizant and Oxford Economics recently surveyed 1,000 US consumers as part of a study, New Work, New World, that assessed the economic impact of gen AI on the US over the next 10 years. Today, I've shared an analysis that reveals new findings that point to the possibility of a growing imbalance in the workplace for women. A few notable highlights:

- 41% of women believe gen AI will negatively impact employment opportunities versus 35% of men.
- More women also think the technology will make it more complicated to develop new skills needed to succeed in the workplace (38% of women vs. 26% of men)
- More women think the technology will hinder job mobility (41% vs. 29% of men)

Interestingly, women's recent gains in the workforce may now make them more exposed to disruption. According to research published by Goldman Sachs, 79% of working women—compared with 58% of working men—are employed in occupations susceptible to gen AI disruption and automation. This is because a higher percentage of working women are employed in white-collar jobs than men.

Our study findings also pointed out occupations historically performed by women that are most at risk from gen AI by 2032. These professions were assigned an "exposure score" that reflects the percent of job tasks that will be automated or assisted by gen AI, weighted by the relative importance of those tasks. Some examples included:

- Office and administrative support workers (85% exposure score)
- Administration assistants and secretaries (50% exposure score)
- Customer service (63% exposure score)
- Marketing managers (58.8% exposure score)
- HR specialists and assistants (55% exposure score)

Minimizing AI risk to female workers

These numbers expose the possibility of a disproportionate disadvantage for a substantial segment of the workforce, and businesses need to take action to right the balance. It will be essential to safeguard women from bearing an unfair share of the negative impacts of gen AI.

In our *New work, new world* report, we discuss the urgent need for a new trust compact that balances the negative impacts of gen AI on individuals and society with its considerable benefits. Clearly, with these new findings, this trust compact is particularly vital for women.

Here are some ways businesses can provide women with equitable access to opportunity and economic mobility in the gen AI era:

- **Use reskilling to help women better understand the capabilities of gen AI.** Our survey shows a correlation between familiarity with gen AI and trust in the technology, which is why our trust compact calls for reskilling programs to be rolled out at a scale never seen before. At Cognizant, we've instituted a Gen AI Skills for Women program in line with our Synapse global skilling commitment. Program objectives include upskilling 500 women across Asia-Pacific and Japan with gen AI fundamentals and skills, creating a community in which to safely practice skills and wield AI with purpose, and improving access to senior women leaders in the industry.
- **Build in workplace supports that are particularly relevant to women** Something gen AI will likely not change is the fact that women are often the primary caregivers to family members. The workplace needs to recognize and support the job flexibility this requires. Doing so will help women better establish a career trajectory into roles that enable them to work alongside gen AI. Cognizant offers a returnship program—a three-month paid program focused on upskilling after a career break—and Be Gritty, which trains new hires to develop a growth mindset.
- **Put gen AI gains to good use.** In the same way today's net zero programs redistribute profits to take care of the planet, tomorrow's gen AI gains might be shared with employees and society. For instance, investments could be made in educational programs to further support reskilling, particularly for highly exposed jobs. Businesses that think progressively about gen AI reinvestment will need to clearly communicate their intent with the workforce and the world.

Safeguarding women from gen AI job loss

As gen AI moves into the mainstream, this powerful technology could distribute productivity gains across social sectors and act as a balance wheel for society. Businesses have an opportunity to help fulfill that promise.

By preparing now, businesses can ensure women—and other underrepresented workers with diverse backgrounds—have a seat at the table when gen AI is implemented. Because for gen AI to achieve its lofty goals, no one can be knowingly left behind by this world-changing technology.

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