
AI & THE FUTURE OF WORK · HR IN AOTEAROA 2026

Which AI future are you building towards?

The World Economic Forum has mapped four possible futures for AI and work by 2030. Most New Zealand organisations are drifting towards the wrong one.

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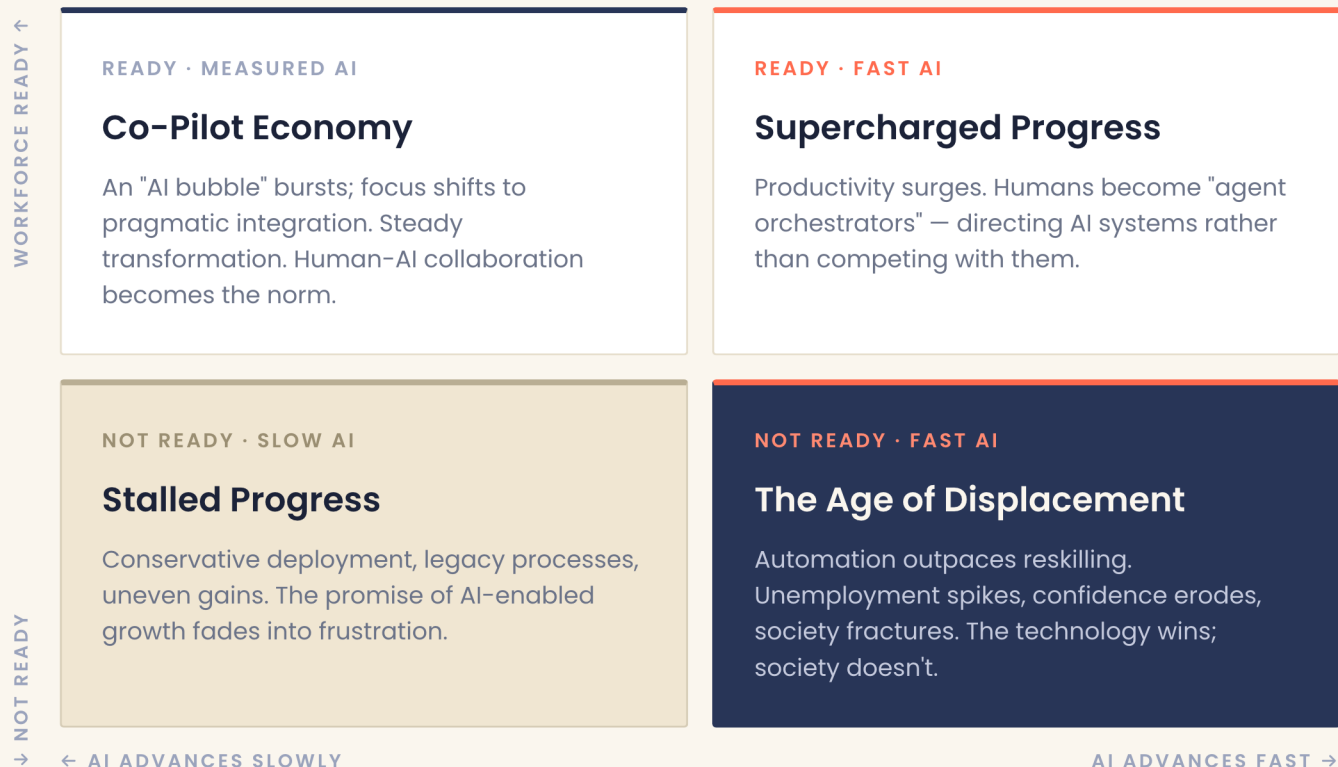
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01

THE FOUR FUTURES

Two axes — how fast AI advances, and how ready the workforce is — combine into four worlds.



The scenario you end up in isn't predetermined. It depends on the decisions organisations and HR leaders make right now — specifically around skills, workforce readiness, and how seriously they treat the transition.

02

WHERE OUR RESEARCH SAYS WE ACTUALLY ARE

It isn't Supercharged Progress. It isn't even the Co-Pilot Economy.

46%

feel even *somewhat* prepared for AI's impact on their workforce

54%

aren't formally using AI tools at all yet

64%

say they're actively preparing for AI's workforce impact

Among those who are using AI, it's mostly limited to document drafting (24%), reporting and data analysis (16%) and policy drafting (12%). Small pockets — not widespread adoption. Governance is sparser still: many organisations have no formal AI policy in place. There is a lot of thinking happening. There is not a lot of doing.

That gap is what makes the WEF's Age of Displacement scenario feel uncomfortably relevant — not because organisations are wilfully ignoring the problem, but because awareness and readiness are not the same thing. And the technology is not waiting.

"It's as if this tsunami is coming at us. It's so close, we can see it on the horizon — and yet people are coming up with explanations for, 'Oh, it's not actually a tsunami, it's just a trick of the light.'"

DARIO AMODEI — CEO, ANTHROPIC

03

THE SKILLS PROBLEM UNDERNEATH THE AI PROBLEM

This is not a New Zealand problem. It is a worldwide one — and that doesn't make it less urgent.

The global data backs the alarm. Most organisations are still experimenting or piloting — nearly two-thirds have not begun scaling AI across the enterprise. The organisations that move faster will pull ahead of the pack globally, not just locally.

88% of employees use AI at work	5% use it in ways that truly transform their work	86% of employers expect AI to transform business by 2030	120M+ workers at medium-term risk of redundancy
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Skills gaps are already the number one barrier to transformation, cited by 63% of global employers, and 39% of core skills will change by 2030. Most are using AI for search and summarisation — dipping a toe in and calling it swimming.

The skills crisis and the AI readiness crisis are the same crisis. Organisations that don't invest in human capability alongside technology are building towards displacement.

04 THE "NO-REGRET" STRATEGIES

Four moves that hold up whichever scenario unfolds.

01 Start small and build fast

Don't wait for clarity before moving. Begin with focused, real use cases and compound the learning quickly.

02 Align technology and talent strategies

Evolve them in tandem — not deploying tools and hoping people catch up, nor training in abstract literacy without direction. Both, together, deliberately.

03 Invest in human-AI collaboration and governance

Build the capability and the guardrails together, so adoption is safe, accountable and able to scale.

04 Prepare for multiple scenarios, not one

Quietly hoping AI won't disrupt you, or waiting for certainty, are both bets on Stalled Progress. It isn't safe — it just feels that way until it isn't.

The organisations moving well on this aren't the ones with the biggest AI budgets or the flashiest tools. They're the ones where HR has a genuine seat at the workforce strategy table, where there's honest conversation about which skills matter in two to three years, and where reskilling is treated as an ongoing operating model — not a project with a start and end date.

THE CHOICE IS REAL

So which future are you building towards?

You're not just deciding whether to adopt a tool or run a training programme. You're making decisions right now that determine whether your organisation ends up in a world where AI amplifies your people — or one where it leaves them behind.

Most NZ organisations sit in the gap between awareness and action. That's not comfortable, but it isn't permanent. The question is whether the next twelve months are the beginning of genuine readiness-building — or another year of planning to plan.

PART 2 OF THE HR IN AOTEAROA 2026 SERIES · SOURCES

WEF — Four Futures for Jobs in the New Economy: AI and Talent in 2030 (January 2026); WEF — Future of Jobs Report 2025; Dario Amodei on the People by WTF podcast, via Fortune India; McKinsey — State of AI Global Survey 2025; EY — Work Reimagined Survey 2025. The HR in Aotearoa 2026 research involved face-to-face interviews with HR leaders across New Zealand.