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The Future Of Work: How Sociology Can Enhance AI Integration In Economic Sectors

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Abstract: What will the future look like? A question with many answers, influenced by wider social events and as yet undecided events, but transforming as time passes. Predicting the future is complex, but certainly conversing about it and how current events shape the future is essential. The future of the labor market and how people undertake work is currently shaped by and linked to increased sophistication and widespread deployment of ICT applications across many different sectors. The trend towards increased technology being used in many different economic sectors will no doubt continue, so that sociology will have an important role to play in how it can work with other disciplines to achieve the maximum benefit. Currently, many advances in making better use of the data already within commercial information systems are improving predictive intelligence and self-driven improvements within existing information system architectures. This implies that human input—while still important in advanced decision making, will become less labor-intensive. AI technologies will be used to graphically represent the data, enabling 'fair' debate with AI over the effectiveness of the AI models.

Keywords: future, sociology, AI integration. Economic sectors, sociology

1. Introduction

Reference should be made to the creation of the EU High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence. The group should support the implementation of the European Strategy on Artificial Intelligence, which puts European values at the center of responsible AI development, deployment, and use. Where is the societal debate about what is really driving workforce change? AI will be used—and is being used—to create new workforce capacity while also creating capacity from the existing workforce. The word 'capacity' is very important in this context and the potential of influencing societal change. AI, just as with many increases in labor productivity, may lead to the potential of a significant increase in socially led enhanced income through a range of AI-supported services. As a result, future demand for services will increase, and the number of employees the population will support will increase. Given the number of societal good arguments for AI development, there is a significant need for societal regulation to be implemented in a manner that neither restricts the potential benefits nor creates new unfair outcomes. The regulatory process should concentrate on impacts rather than AI technologies or services that should be selected for benefit or mitigation, particularly among the most vulnerable members of society.

1.1. Background and Significance

Most of the general and more specialized literature on the current and future impact of new technologies, and AI in particular, has adopted a very general perspective in addressing work-related challenges. Questions such as "Will or won't AI and robots help or destroy work?" "Will robots replace our jobs?" or "What will be the impact of the application of AI on low-wage and low-skilled labor markets?" are the main concerns of significant parts of the general discussion on these topics. Scientists interested in providing the most accurate predictions for impacts also focus on these issues, developing models and projections. These all seem to unfold by relying uniquely on data on technological developments and adoption that are used to estimate models and to make long-term predictions about employment levels – usually showing negative effects, with high variability, in terms of technological developments and impacts.

This work aims to take a step back and to assess if sociological insights can contribute to enhancing the research and outcomes of the ongoing scientific debate. The backbone of our argument is the one that sociology developed to investigate the impact of technological progress. From the large debate on technological determinism, focusing on assessing if large historical changes such as industrial revolutions were the products of technological transformations or of social needs, to the main contributions coming from labor and sociology of work, attention has been posed on understanding how technology invades the workplace and its relations with workers.

2. Theoretical Framework

With important societal aspects ongoing in the discussion, this article will present an analysis of AI integration into economic sectors from a sociological viewpoint. In an interdisciplinary setting with media design, journalism aims to explore advancements in artificial intelligence. The discussion takes up the investigation of the future of work in the context of AI integration and seeks to exemplify how sociological theory may shed light on trends and issues beyond technological developments. Based on the foundation that the consequence of AI integration will be multifaceted and may reshape work environments in intricate manners, sociology may offer theoretical outlooks, methodological insights, and valuable scrutiny of how humans interact with AI technologies.

Bridging the objects of multidisciplinary interest invariably runs the jeopardy of oversimplification unless analytical frameworks are deployed that can appreciate how successions interlock. AI is an emergent progression of inventions that ranges from partially automated systems which help people perform individual tasks to systems that can perform a sequence of tasks autonomously. The setups learn nominal quantities of knowledge by rigorous investigation and infuse normal knowledge to improve decision making. They comprise a considerable number of technologies and strategies, for example sensors, machine learning, machine-to-machine communication, blockchain and

cloud computing (Govia, 2018). The transformation living within the progressive integration of AI renders authoritative studies on approaches to cope with AI urgent. While state-, regional- and international industrial policies involve domain-specific research and machining initiatives, various general-diffusion aspects such as training, altered forms of trade, job creation and job security, technology transfer, and reinforcing societal and environmental sustainability demand a heterogeneous and interdisciplinary approach (Zajko, 2020). Considerations about the trends, possible outcomes and best possible ways to deal with AI should involve sociological understanding of society, culture and nature. From a social-constructivist stance, AI is more than just a set of technological artifacts. It is assemblage of practices, discourses and power relations that gives meaning to these artifacts and technologies. Just as it is constructed and shaped through the human domain, it constructs and shapes the human domain. In short, the introduction and usage of AI is associated with certain societal norms, power relations and cultural contexts that profoundly affect the institutions and people involved. Further, as a complex system, AI comprises constituent elements that interact in a systemic way. It follows that a development in one component can influence and have a causal effect on the others. Viewing AI through the lens of social theory is, then, not an investigation of its physical or technical structure as essentially a black box, but rather an investigation of the relations, actions and processes surrounding and resulting from this innovation.

2.1. Sociological Perspectives on Work and Technology

The relationship among work and technology can be appreciated from a multiplicity of sociological standpoints. For instance, functionalism's examination of labor specialization asserts that as innovative apparatuses continuously reconfigure work tasks, new positions and expertise fields come into existence while others fall into disuse. Conflict theory would interpret workplaces undergoing automation as hierarchies solidifying between those capable to adapt to technological requirements and others economically forced to accept worsening labor conditions. Likewise, symbolic interactionism would observe employee subjectivities and job identities as ongoing outcomes of negotiating technology's place within their workspace.

These classic sociological views on work and technology encapsulate the thoughts underpinning The Future of Work debate spurred on by the proliferate adoption of Ai in economic sectors. Among the many speculation emerging from both sociological and non-sociological school, a network of reports from within organization studies has roused into a loose bloc of writers that actually questions the macro-level labor market disorders forecasts. Such reports, which may be regarded as quasi-structuralist, are normally skeptical of the jobless future thesis, instead arguing that the impacts of new innovative technologies will be diffused chaotically. This sociological variant claims for a nuanced interpretation of AI's widespreadness, asserting that its full feature would not expand through the whole of global industry (Fleming, 2019).

However, it is noticed how such sociological viewpoints are still somewhat lopsided in that they usually withdraw from contemplating the intricacies of dealing human behavior in settings governed by technology. In doing so, this sociological overview urges towards a holistic position with regard to the future incorporation of Ai in certain economic sectors, one able to recognize the simultaneous commingling of hard and soft aspects (Fernández-Macías et al., 2018).

3. The Impact of AI on Economic Sectors

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology promises both to revolutionize societies and economies and to transform the future of work (ABRARDI et al., 2019). The introduction of AI technologies into the economy is expected to have spillover effects on various economic sectors, both positive and negative in nature. On the one hand, the introduction of AI can significantly improve the productivity and efficiency of various processes, which will increase the added value of production processes as a whole. The service industry is likely to be the first where AI innovations will be the most apparent. This will most probably be seen in healthcare, logistics, transportation and commerce where the possibilities for automation in one form or another are significant (Glebova et al., 2024). Currently, these sectors are the largest employers of low-skilled labor.

On the other hand, this transformation will change jobs and may displace some jobs, which is why it is important to understand how the demand for low-skilled jobs will change in the process of (dis)integration of AI technologies into the economy. Recent research indicates that many jobs at both edges of the job market are on path to growing, including ‘hollowing out’ of labor market as middle-pay jobs are decreasing while low-pay and high-pay jobs persist. One of the side effects of the introduction of AI technologies in the economy can also be the possible formation of a long-term economic stagnation and the shift in economic structure, which requires more careful analysis of the introduction of these technologies and the formation of adaptive strategies to ensure the minimisation of negative effects associated with them while maximising their advantages.

3.1. Automation and Job Displacement

A widely reported consequence of a greater integration of AI, both now and in the future, concerns automation and, in funding recipients' phrasing at least, 'the redundancy of workers'. Around two years ago a U.S. based charity produced a report looking at the potential for job displacement, using AI to automate diverse tasks, within a number of sectors. This included a number of interesting results. Whole roles that solely consist of tasks that can be learned from the performance of others are most at risk of automation; many of these examples are routine tasks, for instance, the use and maintenance of machinery by farm workers. Displacement doesn't need to be particularly high in the short term for substantial organisational change; current rates of automation in the U.S. are already causing visible disruption to labour markets; some jobs are already being

automated, such as fast food cashiers to self-service tills, heavily impacting low paid workers. Reports have recently been published exploring the perspective of affected workers. Most visibly, in March 2015, the Financial Times reported on the human cost of the use of robots on the docks at the Port of Los Angeles. Amongst other things, the article profiles former dockworkers struggling with alcoholism and depression in response to their jobs being automated. In light of this and other evidence, the U.S. city, New York, and the IWW union have both recently launched campaigns to ban the use of robots in the service sector. There is some evidence that as automation progresses, gaps in pay and working conditions in routine jobs are widening relative to those in non-routine jobs. Robust evidence is provided that new digital technologies are prejudiced against low paid workers. As Whitehall further automates, attempts should be made to align this with an increase in skill levels. This conclusion mirrors work by other researchers who have argued for greater workforce training and education to accompany the automation of routine roles. The feasibility and efficacy of efforts to retrain already established workforces in response to automation are controversial if taken out of the workplace economy-wide sphere. However, empirical studies have shown that when an organization is responsible for reskilling its workforce in the face of automation, then re-trains its staff with faster and more aggressive strategies. This is further supported by a later publication (Fleming, 2019). In addition, North American studies have shown that in the absence of government intervention the majority of companies are not seen to provide retraining opportunities. Employers have been urged to equip their workforces with “a different set of rich skills” than those that can be learned and performed by machines, and policy-makers to work to 'disseminate high-quality high road practices'.

4. Sociological Approaches to AI Integration

One of the challenges in modernization induced by emerging technologies relates to fostering a better understanding of how AI can be successfully integrated in diverse economic sectors from a sociological approach. Such an approach focus on the human aspects of technology deployment and seeks to enhance future AI strategies through a comprehensive analysis of workplace dynamics. Rooted in an extensive review of the relevant literature, the holistic view advocated in this article includes: a) Profitability and productivity goals always have to be balanced with quality of work and employee’s engagement; b) Organizational culture and social relations condition employee’s behavior and hence the success of technological strategies; c) Communication and collaboration can foster the acceptance of technology among workers and enable the development of successful AI strategies; d) Extrinsic and unilateral personnel policies can defy technological improvement and render costly technologies underused.

Within this frame, a successful and sustainable AI deployment: must consider all the complexity of the working environments and the workforce; can approach manual, routine, and dull tasks, but also those claiming for workers’ social abilities (proofreading,

door-to-door salesman, health care assistance, or hairdressing, among others); would imply different arrangements of work and rest. Previous fears of new AI technologies seem to have been concentrated on the upcoming robots, artificial intelligence and intelligences. Regarding fears and potentials, recent studies indicated a more diverse perspective according to the trade affected by the technological change, where the introduction of robots is not necessarily considered more threatening (Giralt Hernández, 2024). No one-to-one relation was found between the fears raised by workers and the characteristics of the technologies apprehended as threatening. Moreover, respondents considered ‘creative’, ‘empathetic’, or ‘warm social skills’ as least likely to be automatized, in line with the potential to enhance these tasks rather than substituting them.

4.1. Ethical Considerations

It is inevitable that artificial intelligence (AI) will be integrated in almost all economic sectors; this does not mean, however, that the uncritical embrace of AI is ethically defensible. Examining the potential consequences of AI integration from a sociological perspective can help underline ethical considerations that should be addressed when the relevant technologies are implemented in the workplaces. It will be shown how the integration of AI can potentially reproduce or exacerbate existing social inequalities, and how sociological considerations must therefore inform organizational decision-making around this technology.

Once AI software or devices are introduced, organizations can neglect social considerations such as income or education level, gender, age, ethnicity, race, functional empathy, personality traits, general attitudes, and fears. They can rather emphasize mechanisms like shadow work, ample rewards, and working conditions that make it difficult for some workers to perform well in the evaluation, thereby reinforcing a skewed distribution of (dis)advantages among employees. As a result, the workforce competitiveness may lead to increased relative income, advancement opportunities, and job autonomy gaps for marginalized groups who are biased in terms of age, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, and sexual orientation. At the same time, some jobs traditionally held by these workers with incompatible inequality may be rendered more dangerous or less well-compensated following the automation of AI.

5. Case Studies

1. Introduction This article intends to shed light on how the social dimensions of AI adoption and integration in the economy can be better understood through the lenses of sociology. Given the multifaceted social implications of AI, sociological rectitude and expertise are necessary in both the research and innovation processes of AI solutions. Sociology can play an instrumental role in ensuring that the design and implementation of AI systems are socially sensitive, inclusive, and just. This is especially important in the context of the European Union, where new Europe’s Strategy for Data envisions an

economy “where the design and deployment of AI systems are actively steered to integrate societal values, culture, diversity, democracy, fairness and sustainability, as well as fostering its social acceptance.” Drawing on a broad encompassing perspective of optimization, including social optimization, sociology can offer powerful insights into a more balanced implementation and optimization of AI systems (Papagiannidis et al., 2023). In this light, 5 fictional case studies are reported, each one envisioning a real-world situation where AI-based systems are successfully (or less so) designed and integrated in different labour markets and sectors of the economy, with a focus on the socio-technological and social organizational dimensions of such an achievement. Each case is then followed by specific recommendations for sociology-informed AI deployment and optimization. This is expected to significantly increase business opportunities for social science scholars and experts in a context that is becoming more and more AI driven and where the EU desperately needs to strengthen its AI social understanding and technological sovereignty.

5.1. Successful AI Integration Models

The future of work is at a crossroads, as artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly integrated into economic sectors that mutually influence developed models (Bughin, 2023). Across the Atlantic, two cities are hotspots of AI integration in sectors manufacturing, data and development, and financial business services are New York and Portland. Experience of established and young AI adopters is drawn upon, as select organizational cases studied between 2020 and 2022 are deepened. Organizational repertoires and readiness are tested in the fields of AI integration through a comparison of top-down approaches of high-agility adaptors, influencing developed workplace innovation ecosystems.

Initially, the most favored model of AI integration is top-down deployment through agile firms. The financial sector leader in AI and machine-learning patents in the past three years, three-quarters of applications have been either accepted or pending in the US by IBM, Mastercard, Bank of America, PayPal, and Capital One. In this variety of subsectors, only patent exceptions are regional banks with assets under \$100bn. They were acquired by regulatory constraints especially concerning the allowable size of regional lines of credit and customer collection of data.

High-agility manufactures utilize AI to embed a cube-shape. So far, AI applications have mostly been compatible with IR 4.0. However, cloud robotics has recently started shaping AI in specific ways in the production of textile, machinery, and equipment. These are either cradle Industry 4.0 adoptions, that is, treated by implementing most of the extreme scenarios mapped by scores, or later adopters with steepest delayed uptake. Diverse implementation profiles will be examined aiming to compare sectors involved in AI adoptions at the favorite time and not involve any risk that under- or over-inspired effects exclusively in the manufacturing sector are studied.

6. Challenges and Opportunities

The discussion around the future of work (FoW) is shaped both by the manifold expectations concerning transformative socio-economic impacts of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and by the varying capacities of different world regions in developing and applying AI technologies. To date, most analyses of the possibilities, challenges, and difficulties that may prevail future work, as a result of the wide-spread diffusion of AI technologies, have been developed within a framework that juxtaposes deployment and substitution patterns of AI with human work. While offering a useful accounting of these patterns, the application of this framework largely abstracts from other social spheres in which the implementation and use of AI is embedded, as well as from the plurality of actors and stakeholders involved. Some of these absences are indicative of a more general bias within the domain of Future of Work studies; in particular, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to have a clear grasp of the ways in which systemic and relationship-based forces feed into processes of workplace and labour-market change, and vice-versa. This contributes to a picture in which the future of work appears as the autonomous translation of exogenous socio-economic transformations into pre-existing territorial and sectoral labour-market contexts, with displacement, creation, and transformation of job positions merely ensuing from a nearly-automatic response to the perceived opportunities and constraints. Yet, workplace, labour-market, and society-wide dynamics are mutually interconnected in complex and multi-layered ways. Moreover, work can be interpreted as a multi-scalar phenomenon, where “micro” and “meso” phenomena are overdetermined by systemic forces and intersect with broader dynamics that transcend the peculiarity of each specific case. Thus, an understanding of how and why the future of work might co-evolve with the encroachment of powerful new technological factors such as AI requires a more sociological and processual approach.

6.1. Societal Implications

An exclusive focus on technological advancements, predominantly of artificial intelligence (AI), potentially neglects broader societal implications, even though many of those implications will only unfold in interaction with progressing AI (P. Nelson et al., 2023). In the ongoing public and scientific debate, concerns about AI have increasingly moved to the societal domain. At the same time, understanding how these tangible effects of AI will play out in communities and regions and through this affect social structures and vice versa is difficult. With the maturing of AI technologies, the real-world adoption in economic sectors has significantly increased. It is thus increasingly salient to explore the broader effects of industrial AI taking hold in workplaces and regional economies. Policymakers, industrial researchers, and the public are finding intense discussions about the speed at which new technologies will alter workplaces and communities, and whether the implications of these changes are primarily beneficial or detrimental, and for whom. Sociologists and other social scientists have a privileged perspective on these questions. A first, encompass the fear that AI in workplaces would primarily harm the most

vulnerable actors and thus exacerbate prevailing social inequalities. It is in this capacity to disrupt labor markets that the societal ramifications of AI are frequently addressed. It is argued that traditional engineering fields addressing the machine-centric parts of “smart factories” neglect potentially as relevant, but harder-to-model socio-technical systems (STS) aspects, such as work organization, job structures, career pathways, communality, and employment stability of training processes. AI might reshape workplace organization. According to the optimistic perspective, AI could lead to revitalized, more flexible manufacturing systems, open up jobs for high-skilled workers, and could transform monotonous routine jobs into demanding, artisan-like tasks. This might empower production workers and boost their job satisfaction. Finally, a crucial feature of successful industrial AI is the effective design and application of AI-based control and monitoring as part of adaptive production systems. These complex and opaque socio-technological constellations might give rise to doubts about intentionality, accountability, transparency, and ultimately trust, and thus erode the societal license to operate AI applications.

7. Future Research Directions

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming economic sectors and labour on a global scale. Its capacity to automate routine cognitive and manual tasks, its scalability, and its ability to synthesize complex patterns hold vast promises and threats. Stimulating the exercise of sociological imagination in technological advancement, this article synthesizes relevant AI research across sociology—focusing on labour and the economy—and aims to elaborate on how it can help further understanding of AI’s integration and effects across economic sectors. Engaging with work on technology adoption, routine-biased technical change, and more general discussions apportioning uncertainty, this review delineates future research directions open to sociologists. Finally, ongoing progress is contextualized by exploring the evolution of AI research in economics and sociology.

From the technology’s inception, sociologists have explored, critiqued, and simultaneously contributed to the construction of AI. Integrating existing evidence and methods from economic sociology, labour studies, and work and occupations allows for a richer analysis of the current technological zeitgeist.

Since the early 2010s, the debut of technology-oriented publications has attested to the paradigmatic shift of AI, far removed from its niche interests and historical contexts. Nonetheless, the notion AI is entirely novel or revolutionary is exaggerated. What is distinctive can be found in the current technoeconomic paradigm and its effects. Experimenting with combinations of machine learning, deep learning, and finite-mathematical methods has forecasted and prompted AI’s hegemonic rise. Set within a broader milieu acquisition and infrastructure expansion, there is demonstrable regional and sectoral clustering (ABRARDI et al., 2019). Foreign investment in technology and

innovation funds, pushed at the federal level, act as a generative mechanism, stabilizing and intensifying AI adoption. Heightened exploratory behaviors, predominantly accustomed to mid-sized entities, engender labour disruptions but also profit opportunities for the labour market-adjacent apparatus. Galvanizing these quests is a corporate narrative of fear, despondence.

7.1. Interdisciplinary Studies

The discussion in the previous sections highlights the need for interdisciplinary studies to understand the role of AI in economic sectors. The main fields that should be combined to integrate research on AI with potential impacts on economic life are sociology, economics, but also computer science and HRM. This would allow a comprehensive view of a rapidly developing phenomenon. The application of a variety of methodologies usually restricted to different research fields could provide highly useful insights on impacts of AI but currently unavailable. It might also ensure a more efficient bridging of research on AI, which is largely technical or economic, with potential impacts of this technology that originates in other spheres of economic life. By joining forces with research in other fields, sociologists could, in turn, improve their own knowledge on urgent social issues (Fernández-Macías et al., 2018). Close interdisciplinary collaboration is proposed to improve the existing knowledge gaps and enable a better understanding.

There are several ways of combining theoretical frameworks from different disciplines. In this subsection, one integration is illustrated that combines three approaches: TA outlines the structure of jobs and AI implications for the workplace as well as HRM strategies to face them; the concept of technological frames coming from sociology provides a first step towards a job design framework that takes task structure into account; simulation analysis employs sets of rules on how job design should proceed and tests the effectiveness of these rules for a wide range of economic sectors.

8. Conclusion

Sociology is the study of how society is organized and how people experience life. In many ways, technology has led to job growth and increased output, while changing not only the way people work, but trades and sectors which are most relevant in economic terms. There is an increasing demand for technology and connectivity in the workforce, which has become particularly evident in the time of COVID. Still at the relatively early stages of comprehensive artificial intelligence (AI) integration, it is clear that the delivery of inclusive technologies will be a significant focus in how AI continues to progress in nowadays and coming years. Although it is often presumed that AI will make up the vast majority of future roles when speaking in the context of job automation, a wide divergence in how these impacts will distribute will vary widely to across economic sectors. It is also integral to assess the ongoing dynamic process of the creation and destruction of occupational employment by looking at sectors through a historical lens. Whilst at present there is a predominant discourse of trade globalization,

industrialization, and how this is relatively novel in how it will lead to significant changes to the future of work, much of this can be understood through the lens. Alongside with the direction of work, rhythms, temporality, and craft that continually shift as society occurs on new, emerging technologies. Engaging with this current moment's ongoing discourse changes in this way could give a considered approach to these concerns and an opportunity to identify potential future issues better related to the same principles. With considered scenario-based planning and accurate targeting for what is needed to facilitate these considerations, it stands a significantly better chance to manage the social and economic changes to come.

8.1. Key Findings and Recommendations

This essay has explored a broad and complex web of literature and primary data about the socio-economic impacts of AI on the economic sectors, and what sociology can contribute to help guide these impacts toward fairer and more equitable outcomes. In sum, the essay finds that while industrial AI, especially for SMEs, is still in its early days, the organizations and regions that will be best and most fairly able to develop and adopt it have some work to do. An imperative for unions and policymakers at alike scales arises now. This is a wide and uncharted field that will require careful and ongoing monitoring and future research.

As such, it is generally recommended that organizations and policymakers interested in the development and integration of AI in economic sectors should:

1. Prioritize training and upskilling of employees to perform new tasks and work alongside technologies.
2. Foster cultures of inclusion and cooperation to facilitate learning and experimentation with AI.
3. Involve a range of stakeholders in the research and development of AI tech, including workers and representatives on workers' behalf to ensure trust and appropriateness.
4. A need for transparency and accountability from organizations and tech developers and users to reassure the effects of public trust. A step in this process will be the development of ethical AI frameworks and guidelines, multidisciplinary collaborations here are recommended.
5. A need for future research to fully understand the implications of industrial AI technologies and guide policy in moving forward.
6. A working definition of industrial artificial intelligence is adopted. Artificial intelligence technologies are computational systems which attempt to learn and emulate human cognitive functions such as perception, inference, problem solving, language understanding, and planning. Such systems may use statistics, symbolic logic, neural networks, or other methodologies to generate outputs or predictions. Unlike expert systems and other simpler algorithms, practical artificial intelligence systems extrapolate beyond the inputs with a high degree of generality or flexibility. Artificial intelligence has been applied at least since the 1960s, but recent developments in deep learning, large datasets, the revolution, and other factors have ignited a burst of applications in industry. In comparison to expert systems and most earlier applications of AI technologies in

industry, contemporary industrial AI systems have a number of crucial differences in their tech and applications.

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