

Periodic Table of AI Taboos

											
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AI is too
Inflexible

Adaptation

Frustration that AI cannot adjust to personal growth or evolving expertise

Level 4
Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety

Ad
Adaptation

Description

Adaptation captures the frustration professionals feel when AI systems do not evolve with their growing skills, insights, or capabilities. Even as individuals learn, improve, or take on new responsibilities, AI tools often continue to treat them the same—offering the same guidance, restrictions, or oversight. This creates a sense of being underestimated or trapped. The discomfort is rooted in the mismatch between human development and static algorithmic behavior. AI becomes a ceiling, not a support—limiting advancement and flattening identity. People feel stuck in outdated assumptions that the technology refuses to revise.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when skilled employees express frustration that AI tools still treat them like beginners or block more advanced approaches. A manager might say, “It still walks me through basics I mastered years ago.” A designer may avoid AI suggestions that feel like training wheels. People may push back on permissions, interfaces, or workflows that don’t adapt as they grow. Resistance shows up as tool avoidance, rework to bypass restrictions, or discontent in development conversations. The core complaint: “The system hasn’t noticed I’ve changed.”

Possible Actions to Take

To address Adaptation, organizations should design AI systems with built-in learning about the user. Enable tools to recognize patterns of mastery or behavior over time and adjust accordingly. Offer dynamic levels of autonomy and customization that reflect a user’s growth. Communicate how feedback, usage patterns, or roles influence what the system does. Empower people to flag outdated assumptions or suggest refinements. Leadership should reinforce that AI is a partner in development—not a limiter—and should evolve as employees do. Recognition of individual growth within AI interactions restores trust and professional respect.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort arises when people feel their personal growth is not recognized or respected. As they gain experience, AI systems remain fixed—limiting access, assuming inexperience, or enforcing workflows that no longer match their capability. This misalignment erodes confidence in both the system and their role.

(AI is too inflexible)

The discomfort is caused by the system’s inability to evolve. People sense that the AI remains locked in initial assumptions, applying the same logic regardless of improvement or learning. The rigid structure fails to respond to progress, leading users to feel misrepresented by static, unresponsive automation.



People prefer
Human
Interaction



Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences

AI

Alienation

Description

Alienation refers to the emotional discomfort caused by technology replacing human interaction, leading to feelings of loneliness and disconnection. The essence of this taboo is not a concern about the technical quality of AI, but about its inability to fulfill the human need for meaningful social engagement. Alienation reflects unease when machines handle tasks where empathy, warmth, and presence are expected. This resistance highlights a deeper emotional response to automation in spaces traditionally held by personal contact and community-based relationships.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

In practice, Alienation appears when employees resist using chatbots, virtual assistants, or automated customer service systems, particularly in scenarios where human touch is valued. Workers may bypass AI-generated solutions, preferring advice from colleagues or supervisors. Complaints may arise about feeling ignored or emotionally disconnected when personal interactions are replaced by digital interfaces. Alienation also surfaces when people express frustration that communication has become transactional or mechanical due to the implementation of AI in everyday processes that were once relational.

Possible Actions to Take

Addressing Alienation requires organizations to prioritize hybrid systems that balance efficiency with genuine human connection. AI should support, not substitute, emotional touchpoints—especially in contexts like customer care, performance feedback, or team collaboration. Organizations can build trust by ensuring seamless escalation from automated systems to human support. Communicating clearly when and how personal attention is available reinforces emotional security. By acknowledging the emotional stakes and designing AI to complement human strengths, companies can reduce alienation while encouraging respectful use of digital tools.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

This taboo stays at the level of individual choice, driven by emotional preference for human workflows. It reflects discomfort with daily interaction styles rather than structural or ethical resistance. The issue revolves around habits and user comfort, not systemic risks or deep professional trust challenges within the organization.

(People prefer human interaction)

The emotional root of alienation is a strong preference for personal, empathetic exchanges. Technology is rejected here not for performance flaws, but because human connection feels safer, warmer, and more meaningful. Alienation emerges when digital tools fail to meet expectations for relationship-building, care, and social presence.



AI is too
Inflexible

Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences



Am
Amplification

Amplification

Fear of systemic biases being reinforced by algorithms

Description

Amplification refers to the fear that AI systems do not just reflect existing biases but actively reinforce and magnify them, making unfair patterns more widespread. This taboo is rooted in the risk that algorithms trained on biased data will perpetuate discrimination and systemic inequality. Amplification highlights a specific type of harm where automation accelerates or legitimizes biased decision-making, embedding these issues deeper into processes that were previously subject to human judgment. The concern focuses on algorithmic rigidity and the danger of bias becoming less visible, harder to challenge, and more difficult to correct.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Amplification shows up when users question the fairness of AI outputs, such as recruitment filters, credit scoring models, or medical recommendations, especially when outcomes appear skewed against certain groups. Employees may avoid trusting algorithmic suggestions if they suspect bias is baked into the system. Discussions around fairness, auditability, and transparency frequently surface when amplification is at play. This resistance arises when AI-generated decisions consistently favor particular demographics or repeat historical injustices, leading to suspicion, disengagement, and sometimes open refusal to use such systems.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Amplification, organizations should implement routine bias checks, fairness audits, and transparent reporting of AI decision-making criteria. Involve diverse teams in data selection and model validation. Enable mechanisms for users to question or flag biased outcomes, and provide avenues for human review in sensitive decisions. Consider using adaptive algorithms capable of responding to fairness constraints or context-specific adjustments. Communicate openly about steps taken to mitigate bias and emphasize the shared accountability between developers, users, and leadership in preventing amplification of unfairness.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

Resistance remains focused on daily use choices. Concerns lead users to reject or bypass AI tools due to discomfort with perceived bias, without escalating to broader organizational mistrust or systemic fear. The issue influences individual engagement rather than policy-level objections or structural disruption within the business.

(AI is too inflexible)

The issue is driven by algorithmic rigidity. AI systems apply uniform logic without adapting to individual cases or correcting for contextual nuances, causing bias patterns to persist. This lack of flexibility prevents systems from learning or adjusting based on fairness concerns, fueling user discomfort and suspicion toward automated decisions.

Antipathy

Disliking new technology



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences



An
Antipathy

Description

Antipathy describes the emotional rejection or dislike of new technology, often driven by discomfort with change and a preference for familiar methods. This taboo reflects frustration, intimidation, or anxiety toward digital tools, regardless of their functionality. The resistance emerges from emotional responses rather than objective evaluation of the technology's effectiveness. Antipathy surfaces when individuals feel alienated by unfamiliar systems or overwhelmed by learning curves, leading to avoidance or negative attitudes toward innovation efforts. The underlying belief is that traditional, human-driven processes are more comfortable, reliable, or easier to navigate.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Antipathy manifests when individuals choose to avoid or disengage from AI tools, reverting to manual methods even when automation is available. Employees may resist participating in training programs or dismiss the usefulness of digital tools with statements like “the old way works better.” This resistance appears as hesitation to use AI-based recommendations, opting instead for human judgment or previous workflows. Antipathy causes slow technology adoption across teams and may lead to divides between those who are open to innovation and those who feel excluded or threatened by it.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Antipathy, organizations should focus on demystifying AI tools and reducing emotional resistance through clear communication and supportive training. Introduce AI gradually, highlight how it complements rather than replaces human expertise, and offer options for human fallback. Share relatable success stories from peers who have adopted the technology successfully. Directly involve skeptics in feedback loops and decision-making about tool implementation to give them a sense of ownership. Reducing intimidation and emphasizing ease of use helps lower resistance, making technology feel approachable instead of threatening.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

Antipathy reflects personal rejection of technology based on emotional discomfort and preference for familiar workflows. The resistance remains at the level of daily tool choices, not systemic fears or ethical concerns. It involves hesitation to adopt AI due to frustration, intimidation, or preference for manual methods, not structural risk.

(People prefer human interaction)

Antipathy stems from favoring human interaction over machine processes, viewing digital tools as cold or overly complex. This resistance is emotional, not technical—people feel safer, more understood, and engaged with personal communication. The rejection of AI occurs because human methods feel more intuitive, relational, and trustworthy in everyday tasks.



AI is too
Inflexible

Atrophy

Fear of losing traditional skills due to AI dominance

Description

Atrophy reflects the fear that reliance on AI and automation will erode critical human skills, leaving people less capable over time. This taboo centers on the anxiety that continuous machine support will diminish expertise, craftsmanship, or decision-making abilities that require active human engagement. Atrophy expresses the concern that automation displaces not just tasks but the learning and mastery associated with those tasks. The taboo is rooted in the belief that without practice, human capabilities will weaken or disappear, leading to skill degradation and reduced professional competence in key areas.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Atrophy shows up when employees express concern about losing their core skills because AI performs work they were previously responsible for. Professionals may resist automation in areas like data analysis, forecasting, diagnostics, or creative work out of fear that relying on these systems will cause their own expertise to decline. This resistance may take the form of arguments for keeping manual checks or insisting on hands-on involvement in processes that could be automated. The taboo also surfaces in learning and development discussions, where people worry about being left behind or under-skilled in the future workplace.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Atrophy, organizations should focus on combining automation with continuous upskilling and human participation. Design AI systems that augment, not replace, human input—allowing for manual overrides, critical decision-making roles, and opportunities for learning within automated workflows. Promote skill development programs that align with evolving technological tools. Highlight the importance of human judgment and creativity as complements to automation, not casualties of it. Communicate clearly how AI enhances rather than eliminates professional growth, and create spaces where human expertise remains visible, valued, and actively exercised alongside technological innovation.

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



Ay
Atrophy

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

Atrophy expresses anxiety about personal career impact, specifically the fear of losing skills essential to one's role. The concern is not just about daily discomfort but about long-term professional viability and identity. It reflects intense discomfort with the possibility of becoming obsolete or less capable due to overdependence on automation.

(AI is too inflexible)

Atrophy arises because inflexible AI systems automate tasks completely, leaving no room for human practice or adaptation. When algorithms take over without opportunities for involvement, learning, or skill reinforcement, people fear their expertise will atrophy. This rigidity prevents ongoing skill development, making employees feel excluded from meaningful participation.



AI is too
Opaque

Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences



Av
Aversion

Aversion

Not wanting to use all available technological tools

Description

Aversion describes the conscious choice to avoid using certain AI features or capabilities, even when they are available and potentially useful. The issue is not about rejecting technology entirely, but about selectively ignoring or avoiding parts of it. This resistance emerges when users feel that systems are too complex, unclear, or overwhelming, leading to disengagement. The discomfort often stems from a lack of understanding about how these technologies work or from doubts about whether their use is safe, transparent, or reliable.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Aversion becomes visible when employees avoid advanced functions of AI tools, sticking to only basic features or manual alternatives. For example, they may use predictive systems for simple tasks but refuse to engage with automated recommendations or deeper data analysis features. This resistance appears in situations where users skip AI-enabled options, not out of technical failure but because of discomfort with the system's lack of clarity. It can also show up in feedback as confusion, hesitation, or low confidence in using more sophisticated AI functionalities.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Aversion, organizations should focus on making AI systems more transparent and user-friendly. Offer clear explanations of how features work and provide step-by-step guides to build confidence. Use simple language and practical examples in training to demystify advanced functions. Enable users to explore features gradually, with the option to scale up engagement as their comfort grows. Highlight success stories and peer examples to normalize the use of sophisticated AI capabilities. Providing support channels for questions and feedback encourages exploration and lowers resistance.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

Aversion operates at the level of individual tool use and personal workflow choices. The discomfort is not rooted in ethical fears or career anxiety but in feeling overwhelmed or uncertain about specific system features. This resistance affects day-to-day engagement with the technology rather than broader organizational trust or stability.

(AI is too opaque)

Aversion arises because AI systems often lack clear explanations for their functions and outputs. When users do not understand how a system works or why it produces certain results, they become hesitant to fully engage with it. The opacity of AI discourages confidence, leading people to avoid features they do not trust or comprehend.



AI is too
Autonomous



Bw

Bewilderment

Bewilderment

Feeling overwhelmed by rapid AI developments

Description

Bewilderment describes the emotional reaction of feeling overwhelmed or confused by the rapid pace of AI developments. This taboo captures the struggle to keep up with constant change, new technologies, and emerging tools. The discomfort is not a rejection of AI itself, but frustration and disorientation caused by the speed and complexity of innovation. People feel they cannot maintain a clear understanding or effective control over the systems they are expected to use, leading to anxiety, hesitation, or avoidance.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Bewilderment surfaces when employees express that AI changes too quickly to learn or apply effectively. Teams may avoid adopting new tools, delay implementation, or stick to older systems they feel comfortable with. Feedback often includes concerns about not being able to stay current with evolving AI features or feeling undertrained for new releases. This resistance shows up in skipped updates, ignored new functionalities, or reluctance to engage with evolving AI platforms, even when these systems could improve work outcomes.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Bewilderment, organizations should slow down technology rollouts and provide stable learning periods for users. Offer consistent, easy-to-understand training resources and communicate changes well in advance. Provide clear documentation and hands-on support to help users integrate new features into their workflows. Encourage feedback loops where users can voice confusion or suggest pacing adjustments. Balance innovation with stability to give people the time they need to build confidence and competence with AI systems.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

Bewilderment relates to individual choices about how to interact with AI tools on a daily basis. The discomfort reflects personal feelings of overload and confusion when engaging with complex systems or frequent updates. The focus is on maintaining ease and confidence in regular workflows by avoiding technologies perceived as too challenging or fast-moving.

(AI is too autonomous)

Bewilderment is driven by the perception that AI systems evolve and operate with a degree of independence that feels difficult to track or control. The continuous flow of new features and automated changes contributes to a sense of unpredictability, making it hard for users to feel aligned with the system's development.



AI is too
Opaque

Blindspot

AI hides what it doesn't know

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



BI
Blindspot

Description

Blindspot describes the discomfort that arises when AI systems present information with apparent confidence, even when they are uncertain or incomplete. The tool may generate summaries, rankings, or decisions—but it rarely signals what it doesn’t know. There are no warning lights for missing data, limited training, or flawed assumptions. People start to feel that something is being concealed—not maliciously, but by omission. The system always seems sure, even when it shouldn’t be. Blindspot reflects the growing tension of working with a collaborator who never admits doubt.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when teams notice gaps that the AI doesn’t acknowledge—missing context, outdated inputs, or decisions made on shaky ground. Someone might say, “It gave a strong answer, but the data was thin,” or “Why didn’t it tell us it was guessing?” Teams become more cautious, second-guessing AI results and manually checking sources. Trust declines—not because the answers are wrong, but because they come with no visible uncertainty. People feel responsible for identifying blind spots the system won’t reveal.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Blindspot, AI systems should clearly communicate what they can’t see or don’t know. Display confidence scores, flag data limitations, and surface areas of uncertainty alongside results. Equip users with cues like “low certainty” tags or “data ends here” markers. Encourage discussion about unknowns during planning or review. Reinforce that responsible collaboration includes recognizing gaps—not just acting on outputs. Transparency in what’s missing builds confidence in the process, not just the tool.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

This discomfort arises in team settings where collaboration depends on visibility and trust. Blindspot causes breakdowns in shared judgment when team members are left to guess what the AI doesn’t say. The emotional strain comes from having to compensate for invisible gaps, rather than aligning openly on what is known and unknown.

(AI is too opaque)

This taboo is rooted in the belief that AI hides its limitations. People don’t expect perfection—but they do expect visibility into what the system can’t do or doesn’t know. When that’s missing, the AI feels like a black box that pretends to know more than it does.



AI is too
Opaque

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Cc

Concealment

Concealment

AI making it easier to hide one's shortcomings

Description

Concealment describes the discomfort that arises when AI tools allow individuals to hide their own mistakes, gaps in knowledge, or performance weaknesses. The taboo centers on the belief that AI can be used to mask shortcomings instead of addressing them. This leads to unease in team environments where collaboration depends on openness and trust. Concealment highlights the risk that technology becomes a shield behind which weaknesses remain undisclosed, potentially undermining accountability and shared responsibility.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Concealment becomes visible when team members rely on AI to cover for errors or deficiencies without seeking to improve skills or knowledge. This may include using AI-generated outputs without understanding or verifying them, presenting results without disclosing automation, or allowing AI recommendations to replace critical discussion. Colleagues may express frustration if they feel that some team members use technology to avoid taking ownership or responsibility for tasks. This dynamic can damage team trust and lead to tensions in collaborative work environments.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Concealment, organizations should promote open dialogue about how AI tools are used in collaborative work. Encourage transparency about the role of automation in task completion and ensure team members disclose when they rely on AI assistance. Provide training on how to interpret and critically assess AI outputs, rather than using them as unquestioned solutions. Foster a culture of accountability where both human effort and AI support are openly acknowledged. This approach helps prevent misuse of AI as a shield for personal gaps and supports healthy collaboration.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

Concealment belongs at Level 2 because the discomfort affects team dynamics and interpersonal trust. It reflects concerns about fairness and collaboration, where some individuals may gain advantage or avoid scrutiny by relying on opaque AI systems. The issue directly impacts how people work together and how roles are negotiated within shared tasks.

(AI is too opaque)

Bewilderment is driven by the perception that AI systems evolve and operate with a degree of independence that feels difficult to track or control. The continuous flow of new features and automated changes contributes to a sense of unpredictability, making it hard for users to feel aligned with the system's development.



AI is
Emotionless



Cn

Condescension

Condescension

The feeling that people who don't use AI are pitied

Description

Condescension captures the discomfort people feel when non-users of AI are viewed with pity or seen as inferior. This taboo arises when the adoption of AI is framed not just as progress, but as a moral or intellectual superiority, making those who prefer traditional methods feel diminished. The issue is not about the technology itself, but about the interpersonal dynamics and social pressure created when AI users are seen as more capable or advanced, and non-users as lacking or outdated.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Condescension shows up when AI adoption is promoted in ways that imply those who do not embrace it are less intelligent, backward, or incapable. This might be communicated through language in team meetings, training sessions, or leadership messaging that suggests AI use is the only smart or competent choice. Non-users may feel isolated, patronized, or shamed, leading to resistance or withdrawal. The taboo is reinforced when AI tools are showcased as the sole symbol of progress, sidelining other valid skills or approaches.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Condescension, organizations should foster respect for different approaches to work, including those that do not rely on AI. Avoid language that frames AI adoption as inherently superior or obligatory. Encourage dialogue that values a range of skills and recognizes the legitimacy of human expertise alongside automation. Provide choice and flexibility in tool use where possible and acknowledge that meaningful contribution does not depend solely on technology adoption. Training and leadership communication should emphasize inclusion, understanding, and mutual respect across diverse working styles.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

Condescension focuses on daily choices about tools and workflows, where discomfort comes from feeling judged or pitied for not using AI. This resistance is emotional and personal, centered on how people experience respect and value in their immediate work environment, especially regarding their individual approach to completing tasks.

(AI is emotionless)

Condescension connects to the perception that AI lacks emotional sensitivity, contributing to interactions that feel dismissive or patronizing. The taboo reflects how technology-driven conversations may unintentionally ignore human feelings, reinforcing experiences of pity or condescension toward non-users. The absence of empathy in such dynamics amplifies the emotional discomfort people experience.



AI is too
Inflexible

Conformity

AI pressures us to work like it thinks we should

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Cf

Conformity

Description

Conformity reflects the discomfort people feel when AI systems start to shape their behavior—not by force, but by design. The tool may recommend processes, judge decisions, or define success in ways that subtly steer people toward uniform habits. Over time, teams begin to adapt—not because the AI is right, but to avoid pushback, flags, or misalignment. This isn't about control, it's about behavioral pressure. People feel they are working to please the system, not each other. Conformity describes the erosion of human-led choice when AI routines start to overwrite collective wisdom and local flexibility.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when teams adjust their planning, communication, or feedback to match what the AI tracks or rewards. They might say, “We do it that way because the tool prefers it,” or “If we deviate, it marks us low.” It shows up in task systems that penalize changes, review models that reject nuance, or analytics tools that promote consistency over effectiveness. People begin performing for the system instead of for outcomes. Resistance takes the form of quiet frustration, compliance without conviction, and attempts to shield human decisions from algorithmic critique.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Conformity, teams need the freedom to work in ways that reflect their context, not just the system’s defaults. Organizations should make AI recommendations visible and optional, not enforced by scoring or workflow locks. Support hybrid input—where AI guidance coexists with team overrides. Redesign performance dashboards to reflect multiple paths to outcomes, not just one pattern of behavior. Encourage critical discussion about when to follow or bypass the AI’s preferences. When people know they can adapt without penalty, they’re more likely to engage AI as a tool—not a quiet authority.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort arises in team settings, where people must coordinate but feel boxed in by system-driven expectations. It doesn’t threaten jobs or autonomy directly—it limits how teams express judgment, manage exceptions, or trust their shared experience.

(AI is too inflexible)

This taboo reflects the belief that AI doesn’t allow variation. People feel that the system only recognizes or rewards one way of doing things—and gradually nudges teams toward that version, regardless of what makes sense for them.



AI is too
Inflexible

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Co
Constraint

Constraint

Feeling stuck because AI doesn't allow exceptions

Description

Constraint describes the discomfort people feel when AI systems impose rigid rules that prevent flexibility, adaptation, or exception handling. This taboo arises when individuals encounter situations where standard AI-driven processes cannot accommodate specific needs, edge cases, or human judgment. The frustration comes from feeling powerless to override or adjust system behavior when exceptions are clearly needed. Rather than questioning automation entirely, the issue lies in the system's inability to allow professional discretion, especially where fairness and nuanced decision-making are required.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Constraint becomes evident when employees feel trapped by strict AI workflows or policies that lack the option for adjustment or human override. For example, automated customer service systems might deny valid requests because they fall outside defined parameters, or hiring tools might filter out qualified candidates due to rigid criteria. This rigidity can lead to resentment, workarounds, or rejection of the AI solution altogether. Teams may express frustration when AI limits their ability to use professional judgment or offer personalized solutions where fairness demands flexibility.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Constraint, organizations should design AI systems that include options for human review and exception handling. Build in flexibility where users can override or adjust automated decisions when justified. Provide training on identifying when intervention is appropriate and encourage transparency in exception processes. Foster a culture where human judgment complements AI outputs, ensuring that fairness, adaptability, and ethical considerations remain central to decision-making.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

Constraint fits at Level 3 because the discomfort directly impacts trust in the fairness and credibility of professional decisions. When systems prevent people from applying expertise or making justified exceptions, it challenges the integrity of their work. The taboo reflects concerns that rigid automation undermines ethical standards and the ability to deliver just, context-sensitive outcomes.

(AI is too inflexible)

Constraint is driven by the inflexibility of AI systems that operate with fixed rules, limiting their ability to adapt to exceptions or unusual cases. The absence of mechanisms for adjustment or human intervention reinforces frustration when users recognize that fairness or accuracy requires discretion. This rigidity creates the experience of constraint, fueling the taboo.



AI is too
Inflexible

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Ce
Convergence

Convergence

Fear that AI makes all industries the same

Description

Convergence describes the discomfort people feel when AI standardizes approaches across industries, reducing diversity, uniqueness, and differentiation. This taboo captures the fear that automation will lead to sameness, erasing the distinctive methods, cultures, and creative processes that give sectors their identity. The concern is not about whether AI works, but about whether its uniform application will eliminate local knowledge, industry-specific expertise, or individual organizational values. The taboo reflects anxiety that AI will favor efficiency and scale at the expense of variety, innovation, and meaningful differentiation between products, services, or ways of working.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Convergence appears when professionals resist AI tools that enforce similar solutions across contexts where uniqueness is valued. This may include using identical algorithms for hiring, pricing, or content generation in industries that typically rely on specialized judgment. People may express concern that automation removes the nuance that distinguishes their work from others, leading to homogenization. For example, marketing teams might reject AI-generated campaigns that feel generic, or designers might resist tools that output repetitive formats. The taboo is evident when stakeholders push back against AI systems that flatten distinctive features in the name of optimization.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Convergence, organizations should ensure that AI tools are adaptable and capable of respecting context-specific needs. Design systems that allow customization and acknowledge industry distinctions. Encourage collaborative input from subject matter experts to guide AI implementation, making sure local practices and creative elements are preserved. Communicate clearly how AI decisions are adjusted for particular sectors or use cases. Promote a balance between automation and human expertise to retain diversity and differentiation across industries. By supporting flexibility and uniqueness, companies can reduce resistance associated with convergence.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

Convergence creates discomfort by threatening the credibility of sector-specific expertise and practices. Professionals fear that automated standardization strips away the integrity of their work, forcing them into rigid frameworks that disregard their judgment. The concern lies in losing trust in how well AI respects the complexity and uniqueness of their field.

(AI is too inflexible)

The taboo of Convergence is driven by the rigidity of AI systems that apply the same logic and models across different environments. When technology lacks adaptability, it promotes standardization where flexibility and differentiation are needed. This inflexibility fuels the fear that AI will erase meaningful variation between industries and practices.



AI is
Emotionless

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Cr
Corruption

Corruption

Fear that AI accelerates unfair business practices

Description

Corruption refers to the fear that AI will not only reflect existing unethical practices but actively worsen them by speeding up, scaling, or legitimizing unfair behavior. This taboo centers on the anxiety that automation will reinforce harmful patterns—such as biased lending, exploitative labor conditions, or manipulative pricing strategies—because systems are optimized for efficiency or profit without ethical oversight. The concern lies in the belief that AI, when applied to flawed business processes, amplifies damage by making it harder to detect or challenge unethical outcomes, causing mistrust among both employees and external stakeholders.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Corruption appears when teams question the fairness or legitimacy of AI-driven decisions, especially in areas like recruitment, pricing, fraud detection, or resource allocation. Employees may resist relying on AI outputs when they suspect the system is reinforcing unjust policies or manipulating outcomes for unethical gain. Clients and stakeholders may also raise concerns if they perceive AI-based processes as perpetuating discrimination or accelerating harmful practices. Common signals include demands for transparency, calls for independent audits, and active avoidance of automated systems perceived as misaligned with ethical standards.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Corruption, organizations should prioritize ethical design in AI systems. Implement strong governance policies that require fairness assessments and ethical impact evaluations before deployment. Establish independent oversight bodies to review automated decisions and ensure they align with ethical standards. Provide channels for employees and customers to report concerns about unfair outcomes. Embed ethical reasoning into system design by involving diverse teams and human judgment in high-stakes decisions. Communicate openly about how fairness is maintained in AI use, reinforcing trust and accountability while preventing the acceleration of harmful practices.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

Corruption triggers discomfort by damaging trust in the ethical foundation of decisions that affect stakeholders. When people believe AI is accelerating harmful practices, they lose faith in the fairness and legitimacy of outcomes. The fear focuses on integrity within professional processes, undermining confidence in systems meant to deliver just results.

(AI is emotionless)

Corruption aligns with the belief that AI operates without moral judgment or empathy. This emotionless nature of AI leads to unchecked acceleration of unfair practices if ethics are not deliberately embedded. The taboo reflects the discomfort that automation, without human conscience, will execute harmful actions at scale.



AI is too
Opaque

Covertness

AI-driven decisions are made in secret, leaving people uninformed

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Cv
Covertness

Description

Covertness describes the discomfort people feel when AI systems make decisions without disclosing how, why, or even that the decision was made by AI. The taboo centers on the sense of exclusion and disempowerment when key choices—such as hiring outcomes, loan approvals, or service prioritization—are shaped behind closed systems without visibility. The concern is not only about the decision itself but about the secrecy that prevents meaningful inquiry or challenge. People feel they are subject to hidden rules and processes that leave them uninformed and powerless, damaging trust in both the system and the institution deploying it.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Covertness manifests when individuals affected by decisions are unaware that AI played a role or lack access to explanations about the process. This may occur in automated customer service, insurance claims, or hiring platforms where decisions are communicated as final but no rationale is provided. Employees may struggle to explain decisions to clients or partners when they too are excluded from understanding the logic behind AI outputs. The taboo often surfaces in complaints about unfairness, inconsistency, or unexplained outcomes. Feedback frequently includes calls for transparency and the right to contest or question decisions.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Covertness, organizations should prioritize clear disclosure when AI is involved in decision-making processes. Provide understandable explanations of how decisions are made and offer opportunities for questions or appeals. Build interfaces that communicate when and how automation plays a role, ensuring that users can recognize AI involvement. Encourage internal training so employees can explain AI-driven processes confidently. Adopt fairness audits and impact assessments to evaluate where lack of transparency may be creating distrust. Commit to openness and accountability by embedding explainability into both technology design and organizational communication practices.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

Covertness erodes professional trust by making critical decisions feel arbitrary and unaccountable. The discomfort stems from the belief that fairness requires openness about processes that significantly affect people's lives. Without transparency, stakeholders lose confidence in the integrity and legitimacy of decisions shaped by AI systems.

(AI is too opaque)

Covertness is driven by the opacity of AI systems that conceal their internal logic and involvement. This lack of clarity prevents those affected from understanding or questioning decisions, reinforcing feelings of exclusion. The taboo reflects the discomfort that secrecy about AI usage undermines accountability and fosters mistrust.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Df
Defiance

Defiance

Resistance to AI-driven business restructuring

Description

Defiance describes the discomfort and active resistance that arise when AI is used to restructure business processes, especially in ways that replace or marginalize human roles. The taboo centers on the belief that technology-led restructuring disregards human experience, expertise, and relationships, prioritizing efficiency over people. Employees may feel their work, judgment, or identity is devalued when algorithms drive decisions about roles, workflows, or staffing. This resistance is not purely about change but about the sense that restructuring removes the human element from critical areas of business, reducing opportunities for meaningful engagement and undermining professional autonomy.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Defiance surfaces when employees push back against restructuring initiatives that are justified by AI analysis or automation recommendations. This resistance may include rejecting new workflows, openly criticizing automation strategies, or disengaging from implementation processes. It frequently arises in contexts like workforce optimization, scheduling, or strategic planning where AI suggests changes that reduce human oversight or decision-making. The taboo becomes visible in protests, lowered morale, or reduced cooperation with AI-based initiatives. Employees may voice concerns that such restructuring undervalues the importance of human relationships, creativity, and collaboration in business success.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Defiance, organizations should ensure that business restructuring driven by AI involves meaningful human participation. Facilitate open discussions with employees about proposed changes and seek input on how automation could complement rather than replace human work. Clearly explain the rationale behind restructuring decisions and how they align with company values. Provide opportunities for human oversight and decision-making within automated workflows. Encourage transparent dialogue about fears and expectations, reinforcing that AI is a tool for support rather than replacement. Building trust through involvement and respect for human judgment reduces resistance and fosters engagement in transformation efforts.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

Defiance fits at Level 3 because it expresses discomfort about the fairness and integrity of decisions that reshape roles and responsibilities. Resistance is grounded in concerns that AI-driven restructuring threatens professional respect and trust by sidelining human contribution in favor of automated processes.

(People prefer human interaction)

The taboo of Defiance reflects a preference for human-centered processes where collaboration, dialogue, and judgment shape restructuring decisions. Resistance grows when people feel excluded from meaningful conversations about their work and when machine-driven restructuring replaces interpersonal engagement with algorithmic decisions.



AI is too
Opaque

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Dg
Degradation

Description

Degradation captures the fear that the widespread use of AI will diminish the value and relevance of human knowledge and skills. This taboo reflects anxiety that experience, professional expertise, and craftsmanship will be overshadowed by automation, reducing the respect given to human input. The discomfort is not about resistance to technology itself but about the sense that AI systems replace the need for human insight rather than enhance or complement it. Degradation raises concern that decision-makers may prioritize data-driven outputs over the nuanced understanding and contextual knowledge developed through human learning and experience.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Degradation becomes visible when employees feel that their expertise is dismissed or their role diminished because of AI integration. This may occur when leaders favor AI recommendations without consulting skilled staff or when automated systems are seen as more authoritative than human judgment. Professionals might express frustration when their input is ignored or their contributions are replaced by automated processes. The taboo often surfaces through resistance to AI tools, lack of engagement in digital initiatives, or open critique that technology is reducing the importance of experience-based decision-making.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Degradation, organizations should position AI as a support tool that enhances, not replaces, human expertise. Involve skilled professionals in the design and implementation of AI systems and ensure that their insights inform algorithm development. Provide visibility into how human knowledge shapes automated decisions. Foster a culture where human experience and judgment are explicitly recognized as valuable. Offer opportunities for humans to review, challenge, or complement AI outputs. Communicate the role of expertise in guiding AI use, reinforcing the message that technology is meant to empower, not diminish, human contribution.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

Degradation fits Level 2 because the discomfort affects how roles are shaped and how collaboration happens between humans and technology. The concern lies in AI reducing opportunities for people to contribute meaningfully, impacting how tasks are shared and how human expertise is respected within teams and processes.

(AI is too opaque)

The taboo of Degradation is fueled by the opacity of AI systems that do not make it clear how decisions are formed or how knowledge is applied. When people cannot see how their expertise is integrated into automated processes, they feel devalued. Lack of transparency intensifies the sense that human knowledge is being sidelined.



AI is too
Autonomous

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



DI
Delegation

Delegation

AI takes over tasks I'm still responsible for

Description

Delegation describes the discomfort people feel when AI systems start completing work they are still accountable for. The system might automate decisions, write content, or assign tasks—but the user remains on the hook for the outcome. This creates a blurred boundary between tool and teammate. It's not about job loss; it's about having responsibilities without full control. Delegation highlights a breakdown in how people understand their role in AI-assisted work. When outputs are generated without user input, yet judgment or quality is still expected, the result is tension, not trust.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when AI is used to generate reports, communicate with stakeholders, or make workflow decisions—while the employee is still expected to review, approve, or defend the result. Workers may say, “I didn’t do this, but it’s got my name on it,” or “I’m responsible for something I didn’t see.” They may recheck everything manually, resist using the tool, or defer key steps to regain control. Delegation leads to hesitation in shared systems and pushes users to slow down collaboration to reassert their judgment.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Delegation, organizations should clearly define when AI acts independently and when human input is required. Use shared accountability markers—like “AI-assisted” tags or preview steps—to distinguish draft from decision. Build workflows that highlight where review or sign-off is expected. Make delegation configurable so that teams can decide which tasks are automated and which require human action. Leaders should reinforce the message that judgment is not being outsourced. When people feel their role in the process is respected, they’re more willing to let go of the parts AI can handle.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort affects how individuals relate to their teams and how they divide labor. It introduces friction in shared workflows where roles are ambiguous. The issue isn't with personal preferences—it's about navigating team expectations and tool influence in collective outcomes.

(AI is too autonomous)

This taboo reflects the belief that AI is acting with too much independence—handling complex work without meaningful collaboration or consultation. Users feel sidelined by systems that act first, without regard for human oversight or timing.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Dd

Dependence

Dependence

Resenting colleagues who over-rely on AI

Description

Dependence reflects the discomfort that arises when individuals observe colleagues excessively relying on AI systems, leading to resentment and frustration. The core issue is not the use of AI itself but the perceived over-dependence that sidelines personal judgment, experience, or common sense. When people feel that their peers defer too quickly to automated suggestions rather than applying thoughtful consideration or dialogue, it fosters irritation and mistrust. This taboo captures the tension between valuing technological assistance and maintaining professional integrity through independent thinking. It highlights the concern that blind trust in AI diminishes the quality of decisions, reduces critical engagement, and undermines the balance between human expertise and machine-generated outputs.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Dependence becomes visible when teams express dissatisfaction with colleagues who consistently follow AI recommendations without scrutiny. This may show up in meetings where suggestions are justified solely with 'the AI said so,' leaving others feeling excluded from meaningful decision-making. Professionals might voice frustration that discussions are cut short or that AI outputs are treated as final, discouraging debate and questioning. Dependence often surfaces through passive disengagement, sarcasm about AI use, or open criticism of peers who prioritize machine advice over human dialogue. The taboo manifests in environments where over-reliance on automation erodes trust and collaborative spirit within teams.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Dependence, organizations should encourage balanced use of AI by promoting critical review of automated recommendations and reinforcing the value of human oversight. Leaders can foster environments where questioning AI outputs is seen as a strength rather than resistance. Training programs can emphasize collaborative interpretation of AI insights, integrating diverse viewpoints into decision-making. Teams should be empowered to challenge, refine, or complement AI suggestions with their own expertise. Clear communication that AI serves as support, not authority, helps maintain trust and active participation. By valuing human interaction and judgment alongside technological tools, companies can reduce resentment and promote healthier collaboration.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

Dependence fits Level 2 because the discomfort primarily impacts how colleagues interact and share responsibility in decision-making. The concern revolves around disrupted collaboration, where AI reliance changes team dynamics and diminishes the role of human input, leading to interpersonal tensions.

(People prefer human interaction)

This taboo is driven by the belief that effective decisions require human discussion, debate, and judgment. The frustration emerges when automated outputs replace interpersonal engagement, making people feel that meaningful dialogue is being substituted by impersonal, machine-driven conclusions.



AI is
Emotionless

Depletion

Fear that AI depletes the emotional energy and human values from organizational life

Description

Depletion captures the discomfort leaders and employees feel when AI begins to drain the emotional energy, human presence, and cultural identity from the organization. The concern is not about task automation—but about emotional exhaustion. As AI systems optimize performance, they often strip away the rituals, relationships, and narratives that once gave work meaning. People begin to sense that everything still operates—but with less soul. The result is an environment that feels efficient, yet flat; productive, yet disconnected. This taboo reflects anxiety that the organization's inner life is fading—even as its output remains steady.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when people say, “We hit our targets, but it doesn’t feel like us anymore,” or “It’s all delivery—no meaning.” Milestones feel mechanical. Messaging feels templated. Recognition is automated. Leaders delegate emotionally rich tasks to AI systems that respond with polish but no presence. People begin to disengage—not because they’re excluded, but because they feel emotionally depleted. The cultural atmosphere grows thinner, and morale flattens. Resistance shows up as emotional fatigue, reduced commitment, or quiet exit—not because systems failed, but because they no longer feel human.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Depletion, organizations must actively reinvest in emotional and cultural presence. Audit where AI has replaced—not just supported—human engagement. Restore rituals, conversations, and gestures that carry meaning. Make space for leaders to model emotional investment. Align recognition, communication, and milestones with human values, not just KPIs. Recenter shared experience—not just productivity—as a measure of success. When people feel that their work still reflects who they are and what they care about, they reengage. Replenishing culture isn’t a luxury—it’s what keeps the system alive.

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Dn
Depletion

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

This taboo reflects concern that emotional depletion undermines identity, loyalty, and cohesion. When meaning and humanity are drained from work, the system may survive—but the culture won’t. People don’t just disengage from roles—they disconnect from the mission.

(AI is emotionless)

The discomfort stems from the belief that AI replaces connection with calculation. The systems may be functional—but they don’t feel. Over time, emotional energy erodes because people no longer sense that the organization reflects care, culture, or shared meaning.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 4
Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety

Dt
Destitution

Destitution

Fear that AI increases job insecurity through automation

Description

Destitution represents the deep concern that the rise of AI and automation directly threatens job stability and personal livelihood. This taboo reflects the fear that skilled roles will be eliminated, responsibilities downsized, or positions fundamentally redefined without adequate human-centered planning. It's not simply about technological progress but about the vulnerability felt when employment and income security are placed at risk by decisions that prioritize efficiency over people. Destitution captures the anxiety that careers may be devalued and that human contribution will be replaced by algorithmic processes, leaving individuals uncertain about their relevance and future role within the organization. The discomfort emerges from a loss of agency over one's professional trajectory.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Destitution surfaces when employees express fear about layoffs, role reductions, or the automation of key tasks they currently perform. This taboo may become evident through disengagement, declining morale, or direct pushback against AI initiatives framed around cost-cutting or efficiency. Conversations often contain worries about being 'replaced by a machine' or losing the opportunity to apply their skills meaningfully. Employees might avoid learning new systems they perceive as designed to phase them out, or they may openly criticize leadership for not addressing the human impact of technological transitions. The taboo is especially visible when career development conversations are dominated by uncertainty about the future.

Possible Actions to Take

To mitigate Destitution, organizations should prioritize transparent communication about the future of roles in an AI-enhanced environment. Leaders can offer reassurance through reskilling programs, career pathways that integrate AI fluency, and open dialogue about how technology will complement—not replace—human work. Involve employees in discussions about how their expertise can evolve alongside automation. Acknowledge the emotional impact of change and provide support through coaching, mentorship, or peer-learning initiatives. By reinforcing that human skills remain essential and valued, companies can reduce anxiety and foster a culture where technological transformation feels inclusive, not threatening.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort in Destitution directly affects people's sense of career continuity and the future of their professional roles. The focus is on long-term fears about employability and the erosion of one's work identity, not just on immediate collaboration or fairness issues. This makes the concern larger in scope, extending into livelihood and personal security.

(People prefer human interaction)

The concern grows from the belief that human relationships and face-to-face interaction provide reassurance and recognition in the workplace. Automated decisions about roles and job futures feel impersonal and dismissive, amplifying the fear that individuals will be pushed aside without conversation or empathy.



AI is
Emotionless

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Dt
Detachment

Detachment

AI misses emotional cues in shared work

Description

Detachment describes the discomfort teams experience when AI responds to collaborative tasks without emotional awareness. The system may summarize updates, log blockers, or trigger handoffs—yet fail to register that someone is upset, under pressure, or disappointed. The result is not error, but emotional tone-deafness. Detachment reflects a mismatch between how humans rely on cues in teamwork and how AI flattens or erases those signals. Over time, this forces teammates to step in, compensate, or clarify feelings the AI cannot detect, creating extra emotional labor and eroding trust in automated support.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo appears when the AI sends reminders during tense moments, skips over conflict, or reports status in ways that sound cheerful while a team is stressed. People might say, “That’s not the right tone for what just happened,” or “It’s acting like everything’s fine.” Teams begin rephrasing updates, avoiding automated tools, or assigning human intermediaries to “handle tone.” Detachment doesn’t stop work—but it frays connection. People start bypassing the system to manage the relational dynamics it overlooks.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Detachment, organizations should improve the emotional intelligence of collaborative AI features. Equip systems to recognize signals of stress or hesitation and pause automation accordingly. Provide tone modulation options or human review layers for messages delivered in sensitive contexts. Encourage teams to note emotionally relevant cues that systems may miss. Normalize the practice of stepping in to “translate” the mood when AI doesn’t pick it up. AI doesn’t need to be emotional—it just needs to leave space for emotion to be acknowledged.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort affects team dynamics—not individual comfort or job security. It surfaces when collaboration breaks down due to the AI’s inability to reflect shared emotional states. The result is friction in coordination, not fear or dysfunction.

(AI is emotionless)

This taboo stems from the belief that AI lacks the ability to sense or reflect emotional nuance in team interactions. Its responses may be accurate, but they feel insensitive or disconnected. People perceive this emotional absence as a gap that undermines shared understanding—especially in collaborative settings where tone, timing, and mood matter deeply.



AI is
Emotionless

Devastation

Negative environmental or societal effects of AI

Level 3

Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Dv

Devastation

Description

Devastation reflects the concern that the deployment of AI systems may lead to unintended harmful consequences for the environment or society at large. This taboo is rooted in the fear that optimization for efficiency or profitability can result in negative externalities such as resource overconsumption, ecological damage, or social dislocation. People worry that decisions made by AI systems lack the ethical judgment needed to recognize broader impacts beyond immediate objectives. The discomfort arises when individuals feel that AI, without human conscience, might enable choices that are technically sound but socially irresponsible. This taboo signals deep unease about the long-term effects of technology on shared social and ecological systems.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Devastation surfaces when employees, stakeholders, or customers question whether AI-driven decisions account for social or environmental well-being. People may resist adopting tools they perceive as harmful to sustainability or as contributing to inequality, job losses, or exploitation. Concerns often appear through public criticism, internal ethical debates, or campaigns calling for responsible AI use. Teams might raise questions about whether carbon footprint, ethical sourcing, or community impacts were considered in automation strategies. The taboo is visible when fear grows that AI accelerates damage by scaling harmful processes, while lacking mechanisms for moral reflection or accountability.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Devastation, organizations should integrate ethical review and environmental assessments into AI development and deployment processes. Engage diverse stakeholders to ensure that social and ecological risks are identified and mitigated. Communicate transparently about the ethical safeguards in place and demonstrate how systems align with broader sustainability goals. Consider embedding human oversight at critical decision points, especially where social or environmental impacts are significant. Promote accountability by supporting external audits and ethical certifications for AI applications. By taking visible responsibility for the wider effects of AI, organizations can rebuild trust and reduce resistance linked to fears of societal or ecological harm.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

The discomfort in Devastation focuses on the belief that AI-driven decisions may undermine fairness and responsibility toward broader societal or environmental concerns. The issue challenges trust in professional processes by raising doubts about the ethical integrity of the systems being deployed.

(AI is emotionless)

This taboo stems from the perception that AI lacks empathy and moral judgment, operating purely on logic and data without regard for human or ecological consequences. The absence of emotional awareness amplifies fears that AI may justify harmful outcomes without ethical consideration.



AI is too
Autonomous

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Du
Diffusion

Diffusion

Losing personal responsibility if AI distributes tasks

Description

Diffusion captures the discomfort that emerges when decision-making becomes so distributed across AI systems that personal accountability fades. The core fear is that responsibility for critical choices becomes unclear when multiple algorithms and automated processes are involved, creating a gap where no individual feels fully answerable for outcomes. This taboo reflects concern that the delegation of decisions to AI, while efficient, erodes the sense of ownership that underpins ethical and thoughtful action. People worry that this diffusion of responsibility not only weakens accountability but also reduces the quality of oversight, allowing problematic decisions to pass without question because 'the system decided.'

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Diffusion becomes evident when employees hesitate to take ownership of decisions influenced by AI or when mistakes are blamed on 'the algorithm' rather than discussed constructively. This taboo shows up through vague explanations, deflection of responsibility, or avoidance of difficult conversations about outcomes. Teams might experience frustration when accountability structures become unclear due to heavy reliance on distributed AI tools. Discussions around failure or error can grow tense when no one feels empowered—or obligated—to step forward and explain how and why a particular decision was made. The taboo fosters mistrust and complicates collaborative work when personal engagement in decision-making feels undermined.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Diffusion, organizations should reinforce clear lines of accountability even when AI systems play a central role. Define who remains responsible for final decisions and ensure that automation supports, rather than replaces, accountable leadership. Build transparency into AI-supported workflows so that decision paths are traceable and understandable. Encourage teams to review and discuss AI-driven recommendations critically, maintaining human responsibility as a core principle. Provide governance frameworks that clarify roles and obligations at every stage of automated processes. By upholding personal engagement and ethical ownership, organizations can prevent accountability gaps and foster trust in both people and systems.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

The concern in Diffusion focuses on the erosion of trust in decision-making processes when accountability is weakened. The issue directly affects perceptions of fairness and professional integrity, as unclear responsibility damages confidence in how decisions are managed and justified.

(AI is too autonomous)

The taboo is fueled by the belief that highly autonomous AI systems reduce human involvement in decision-making to the point where control and accountability become diluted. People feel uncomfortable when decisions are executed independently by technology without adequate human input or oversight.



AI is
Emotionless

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



Da

Disappointment

Disappointment

Regret choosing your profession due to AI

Description

Disappointment reflects the emotional impact of realizing that the profession one chose may be devalued or made obsolete by the rise of AI. This taboo speaks to the personal regret and disillusionment that arise when individuals feel their career aspirations and hard-earned skills are undercut by automation. It is not simply about task replacement, but about the deeper frustration of seeing one's role, passion, or sense of purpose diminished by technology. The fear is that years of dedication and expertise may no longer hold value in a world where machines can replicate or outperform human efforts, leading to a profound questioning of career choices and professional identity.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Disappointment often surfaces in conversations where professionals express frustration or sadness about the future relevance of their work. Individuals may voice regret about entering fields now perceived as at risk of automation or may discourage others from following similar career paths. This taboo can show up in reluctance to engage with AI tools, avoidance of upskilling initiatives, or disengagement from workplace development programs. It may also manifest as cynicism toward leadership messages about digital transformation. The underlying emotional tone includes discouragement and erosion of pride in one's profession, reflecting the pain of feeling one's career might become meaningless.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Disappointment, organizations should recognize not only the professional challenges but also the emotional weight that career disruption brings. Acknowledge the feelings of regret and fear without judgment and provide safe spaces where these concerns can be openly discussed. Offer career coaching, mentoring, and emotional support to help individuals process these changes constructively. At the same time, promote clear pathways for upskilling, reskilling, and exploring adjacent career opportunities where human creativity and judgment remain irreplaceable. Frame these transitions as empowering choices, highlighting success stories of adaptation and personal growth. By combining emotional care with practical development, organizations can help individuals rebuild confidence, fostering both resilience and enthusiasm for future possibilities.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort in Disappointment centers on the personal impact of automation on long-term career identity and choice. The concern reaches beyond current roles, touching on existential fears about wasted effort and future employability, positioning it firmly at this level of discomfort.

(AI is emotionless)

The belief driving this taboo is that AI, lacking empathy or emotional understanding, can replace human passion and dedication without recognizing the personal investment behind professional choices. This emotional disconnect deepens the sense of regret and fuels resistance.



AI is too
Autonomous

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Dc
Discrimination

Discrimination

Skepticism about AI making fair decisions

Description

Discrimination refers to the deep skepticism people feel when they believe that AI systems may make biased or unfair decisions. The discomfort arises from a perception that, without proper checks, AI can perpetuate or even amplify discrimination embedded in data or algorithms. This taboo captures a fear that automated decisions might overlook critical human contexts, resulting in unjust outcomes. Rather than trusting that AI will enhance fairness, individuals worry that these systems could entrench inequities under the guise of objectivity. The emotional core of this taboo is the anxiety that people may suffer harm or injustice without recourse because a machine, not a human, decided their fate.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

In the workplace, Discrimination surfaces when employees question whether AI systems consider fairness, equity, or context in their decisions. It shows up in comments like, “How do we know the algorithm isn’t biased?” or “Why should we trust this score or ranking?” Employees may resist adopting AI tools if they suspect that these systems make opaque choices affecting hiring, promotions, credit scoring, or customer prioritization. This taboo often appears during heated discussions about fairness audits, model explainability, or ethics reviews. Team members may demand human oversight or reject AI-generated outcomes altogether if they feel that accountability is missing.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce resistance linked to Discrimination, organizations should prioritize transparency and fairness in AI design and deployment. This includes conducting regular bias audits, involving diverse stakeholders in algorithm review processes, and clearly communicating how fairness is measured and safeguarded. Establish human-in-the-loop mechanisms to ensure that AI decisions affecting people are subject to human validation and context-sensitive adjustments. Foster open dialogue about concerns, encouraging teams to question and critique AI outputs without fear of being labeled resistant. Provide training on how bias can enter AI systems and what steps are taken to mitigate it. By embedding fairness into both culture and technology, organizations can rebuild trust and address this taboo directly.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

The discomfort in Discrimination directly challenges the trustworthiness of professional processes. It focuses on the risk that AI might undermine standards of fairness, equity, and ethical conduct, placing it at this level where professional integrity and justice are in question.

(AI is too autonomous)

This taboo is fueled by the belief that highly autonomous AI systems can make critical decisions without human intervention, leaving little room for accountability or contextual judgment. The concern is that without human checks, these systems may enforce biased outcomes independently.



AI is too
Autonomous

Dismissal

Fear of losing your job to AI

Description

Dismissal captures the intense fear that AI and automation could directly lead to job loss or the devaluation of one's professional role. This taboo reflects a deep anxiety that technological systems might replace human labor entirely, leaving individuals without meaningful work or security. It is not merely about efficiency gains or process optimization; it is about the emotional distress caused by the possibility of being deemed unnecessary. People experiencing this taboo often feel powerless in the face of change, worrying that their skills and expertise may become obsolete. The fear revolves around exclusion from work that once provided not only income but also identity and purpose.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Dismissal commonly surfaces when employees voice concerns about automation projects or AI-driven restructuring plans. Comments like, "Are they planning to replace us with machines?" or "What happens to my job if this system works?" are direct signals of this taboo. It manifests through reduced engagement with AI initiatives, suspicion toward technology upgrades, and reluctance to participate in AI training programs. Employees may actively oppose AI adoption, lobby for guarantees against layoffs, or express skepticism about leadership's intentions. The emotional tone often includes fear, frustration, and withdrawal, especially when discussions focus on productivity gains without addressing human impact.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Dismissal, organizations should provide transparent communication about how AI will be integrated into workflows and clarify the future of human roles alongside automation. Offer clear commitments to reskilling, upskilling, and job evolution, emphasizing how AI can augment rather than replace human effort. Foster open discussions where employees can safely express concerns and receive honest feedback. Leadership should highlight success stories where people have adapted to AI-enhanced roles and provide tangible support through coaching, mentoring, and career planning initiatives. By focusing on empowerment, inclusion, and skill development, companies can help reduce the anxiety linked to this taboo and encourage a culture of shared growth with technology.

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



Dm

Dismissal

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

Dismissal sits at this level because the discomfort goes beyond immediate tasks or fairness debates—it targets long-term career security and personal livelihood. The anxiety is rooted in fears about employability and role survival, making the emotional intensity particularly high.

(AI is too autonomous)

The belief driving this taboo is that highly autonomous AI systems will operate independently, replacing human roles without oversight or care for individual contribution. This autonomy triggers fear that decisions about job reduction will be made by machines, not people.



AI is
Emotionless



Ds
Dismissiveness

Dismissiveness

AI ignores the emotional tone of my input

Description

Dismissiveness reflects the subtle frustration users experience when AI systems respond to emotionally charged input with flat, neutral, or robotic replies. The issue is not about hostility or inaccuracy, but the absence of acknowledgment or empathy. Users may express urgency, frustration, enthusiasm, or worry—only to receive replies that feel indifferent or disconnected. This emotional mismatch leads to discomfort, especially in moments where tone matters. The experience of being emotionally brushed aside by technology creates a sense of being unheard, even when the response is technically correct. It undermines the feeling of being respected or understood in one's work.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Dismissiveness becomes visible when employees react negatively to AI-generated responses that fail to “read the room.” A customer support agent might feel the chatbot’s tone is too cold for an upset client. A manager might find the AI’s neutral phrasing jarring after submitting a stressed query. Reactions include muting AI tools, editing responses to add warmth, or opting to write messages manually instead. People may say things like “That’s not how I’d put it,” or “It missed the point completely.” The system’s emotional tone-deafness quietly discourages trust and encourages human intervention, even for simple tasks.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Dismissiveness, organizations should train AI systems to better detect and mirror emotional cues in language. Use sentiment-aware models that adapt tone to match urgency or context, especially in writing support tools, virtual assistants, and messaging platforms. Offer tone-adjustment features that let users preview and customize emotional framing. Encourage users to flag tone mismatches, and use that feedback to improve training data. Communicate clearly that AI tone isn’t perfect and emphasize that human judgment can override outputs.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort caused by Dismissiveness is rooted in individual expectations about tone, empathy, and communication style. It does not disrupt collaboration, ethical norms, or career paths—it simply causes emotional disengagement from tools that feel impersonal. Users still perform their work but with reluctance or extra effort to correct the AI’s tone.

(AI is emotionless)

This taboo is fueled by the belief that AI cannot register or respond to human emotions. The system is seen as emotionally hollow—unable to reflect the tone of the message it receives. The resistance emerges from the mismatch between human expression and AI’s emotionally flat interpretation of it.



AI is too
Autonomous

Displacement

Fear that AI will bypass roles altogether by reshaping industries

Description

Displacement captures the anxiety that AI will not just automate existing jobs but redefine entire industries, rendering current roles and professional identities irrelevant. The fear is not just about task replacement, but about losing the very category of work one belongs to. It surfaces when people worry that what they've trained for, built careers around, and socially identified with may no longer exist. AI is seen not only as a tool that alters workflows but as a force that redraws the boundaries of what counts as work, leaving workers unsure if there's any future place for them at all.

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety

Dp
Displacement

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Displacement appears when employees express dread that their entire field may be overtaken by AI-driven logic. A marketing specialist might say, “Everything’s turning into data models now—do we even need creatives anymore?” A financial advisor may quietly skip automation briefings, believing their career will soon be defined by tech they didn’t choose. Teams hesitate to invest in skill-building, sensing that even adaptation might not save a disappearing role. Resistance here is subtle but pervasive: apathy toward innovation, identity confusion, and a slow retreat from roles perceived as doomed.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Displacement, organizations should frame AI as an evolving collaborator, not an autonomous architect of work. Communicate clearly how emerging roles are co-created with human insight, not imposed by algorithms. Highlight success stories where professions have evolved rather than disappeared. Involve employees in forecasting the future of their industries, giving them a role in shaping how AI fits. Offer reskilling paths that don't just train people for tools, but redefine how their expertise continues to matter. Reassure people that the evolution of work includes them—not just the technology.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

This taboo fits Level 4 because the discomfort centers on long-term fears about job relevance and professional identity. It affects people's sense of career continuity, not just their current tasks.

(AI is too autonomous)

This taboo stems from the belief that AI is acting too independently—restructuring industries and roles without human oversight. People feel that decisions about the future of work are being made autonomously and out of their control.



AI is too
Opaque

Disproportion

Frustration with unequal pay scales between tech and non-tech roles

Description

Disproportion reflects the growing frustration and resentment among employees when they perceive significant pay gaps between those working in AI, data science, or technical roles and their non-technical colleagues. This taboo emerges from the belief that while AI and automation may drive operational change, they also contribute to widening inequalities within the organization. The discomfort lies not just in salary figures but in the sense that some roles are disproportionately valued over others, undermining morale and eroding the perceived fairness of the workplace. This taboo represents an emotional reaction to perceived injustice, where contributions outside of the AI or tech sphere feel diminished and undervalued.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

In daily work environments, Disproportion surfaces when non-technical staff question why AI developers, data scientists, or automation engineers receive higher compensation, bonuses, or recognition. Phrases like, “Why are they paid so much more when we keep the business running?” or “Our work is just as critical” reflect this sentiment. It may appear as passive resistance toward AI initiatives or as reduced collaboration between technical and non-technical teams. Non-tech employees may disengage from projects where they feel undervalued, or they might resist new technology rollouts because of a sense of unfairness about the benefits distribution. The tension can become especially visible during performance reviews, salary discussions, or talent retention conversations.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Disproportion, organizations should foster transparency about how compensation decisions are made across roles, including the rationale behind pay scales for technical versus non-technical positions. Encourage open discussions about career development opportunities and provide pathways for non-tech employees to participate in AI-related upskilling if they choose. Leadership should recognize and celebrate contributions from all functions equally, not just the technical teams. Consider non-monetary recognition programs that highlight collaborative efforts between tech and non-tech staff. By communicating clearly about the skills premium while promoting fairness and inclusion, companies can reduce resentment and foster a culture of shared success.

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Dr
Disproportion

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

This taboo fits this level because it challenges the fairness and integrity of professional recognition within the organization. The issue is not about workflow preferences but about ethical questions around equitable compensation and the professional value placed on different roles.

(AI is too opaque)

The frustration in Disproportion is driven by the belief that AI and its technical complexity make value judgments opaque and hard to challenge. People may feel excluded from understanding or questioning how tech roles are evaluated and rewarded, deepening the sense of injustice.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



De
Dissonance

Dissonance

Fear that AI makes leadership feel emotionally insincere

Description

Dissonance captures the discomfort people feel when the emotional tone of leadership messaging is contradicted by the AI-driven systems they interact with every day. The concern is not technical failure—it's emotional mismatch. Leaders speak of care, fairness, or community, but employees experience cold, impersonal automation in moments that once required presence. People feel confused, even betrayed, when promised values are not lived in daily practice. The result is cultural instability—not because the AI is wrong, but because it feels misaligned with what the organization claims to stand for. This taboo isn't about silence—it's about hypocrisy.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when employees say, “They talk about empathy, but the system doesn’t show any,” or “It’s all talk, no feeling.” Leaders may emphasize inclusion, care, or responsiveness in speeches, but AI tools deliver feedback, recognition, or support in ways that feel generic, abrupt, or emotionally flat. Teams sense that tone has been outsourced while values are performative. People stop trusting leadership narratives when the technology they rely on tells a different story. Resistance appears as skepticism toward official messaging, disengagement from culture initiatives, or quiet rejection of “values” that don’t translate into experience.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Dissonance, organizations should ensure that emotionally resonant leadership messages are echoed in everyday systems. Audit how AI mediates feedback, recognition, or support—and whether it reflects the culture being communicated. Keep humans visible in moments that affirm values. Allow space for leaders to act—not just speak—in ways that show up emotionally. Align policies, systems, and tools with the emotional texture of the values they are meant to uphold. Rebuild emotional credibility by reducing contradiction. When people see that leadership walks the talk—not just through words, but through experience—trust and cohesion return.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

This taboo reflects a breakdown between declared values and lived reality. When AI systems emotionally contradict leadership narratives, people lose trust—not just in tools, but in the institution itself. Over time, the culture becomes performative, and belonging erodes.

(People prefer human interaction)

The discomfort stems from the belief that emotionally meaningful messages must be matched by human presence. People don’t just want human interaction—they rely on it to feel what the organization stands for. AI can’t carry that weight. When it does, the message rings hollow.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Di
Distance

Distance

Fear of losing interpersonal connections in team dynamics

Description

Distance reflects the emotional discomfort that arises when people fear that AI systems and automation might erode interpersonal connections within teams. This taboo is rooted in the belief that genuine collaboration and relationship-building depend on human interaction, empathy, and shared experiences. When digital systems replace or mediate too much of the communication between colleagues, the result can feel isolating rather than supportive. People worry that reliance on AI for coordination, decision-making, or communication will strip away the informal, spontaneous, and personal exchanges that foster trust, creativity, and mutual understanding in the workplace.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

In practice, Distance surfaces when employees express frustration about collaborating through automated workflows, chatbots, or algorithmically scheduled tasks instead of direct conversation with peers. Comments like, “I miss just talking to my teammates” or “Everything feels so transactional now” indicate this taboo at play. It can also manifest as reluctance to adopt collaboration tools that minimize meetings or personal interaction. Teams may show signs of lower engagement, weakened social bonds, or decreased cohesion when technology becomes a substitute for interpersonal contact rather than a facilitator. People may feel disconnected from their colleagues and less invested in shared goals.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Distance, organizations should intentionally design collaboration processes that balance technology with human connection. Encourage face-to-face meetings or video calls where meaningful discussion and relationship-building can occur. Make space for informal exchanges and social rituals that foster team cohesion, such as check-ins, shared lunches, or virtual coffee chats. When introducing AI tools for coordination or communication, clearly frame them as enablers of human connection, not replacements for it. Provide training on maintaining relationship-centered collaboration in digital environments. By emphasizing human contact and emotional engagement alongside automation, organizations can reduce the sense of Distance and strengthen team bonds.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort in Distance fits this level because it primarily disrupts team dynamics and interpersonal working relationships. While the fear is significant, it centers on daily interactions and collaboration adjustments rather than existential threats to career or organizational stability.

(People prefer human interaction)

This taboo is driven by the belief that authentic teamwork and effective communication require human presence, empathy, and relational engagement—qualities that automated systems cannot replicate. The preference for human interaction is at the heart of the discomfort.



AI is
Emotionless

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Do
Domination

Domination

Worry that AI will be governed too much by tech giants/governments

Description

Domination captures the deep concern that the control and governance of AI systems may become concentrated in the hands of a few powerful entities, such as major tech corporations or government bodies. This taboo reflects fears of monopolization and manipulation, where decision-making around AI ethics, deployment, and innovation could be driven by interests that are disconnected from the needs of everyday users, employees, or communities. The emotional weight of this taboo lies in the sense of disempowerment—the belief that people and organizations will lose agency, voice, or influence over technologies that deeply affect their lives and work. It signals discomfort with systemic inequality and the potential misuse of AI for control rather than collective benefit.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Domination manifests when employees, leaders, or stakeholders express skepticism about adopting AI solutions from large tech providers or question the motives behind government-backed AI initiatives. You might hear statements like, “This just feels like another way for big tech to tighten its grip” or “Who really controls this system, and can we trust them?” These concerns often arise during vendor selection, compliance discussions, or debates about data ownership and sovereignty. Teams may resist engagement with proprietary platforms, preferring open-source or decentralized alternatives. The taboo can also lead to internal pushback against partnerships or policies perceived as favoring dominant players without sufficient ethical oversight.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Domination, organizations should emphasize transparent vendor relationships and maintain critical oversight of AI governance structures. Prioritize collaborations that include ethical review processes and ensure diverse stakeholder involvement in AI-related decisions. Consider adopting open-source, explainable, or locally governed AI tools where possible to avoid over-reliance on dominant providers. Communicate openly about how data rights, system choices, and ethical standards are being safeguarded. Engage employees and external partners in ongoing dialogue about the implications of AI adoption on autonomy and fairness. By actively questioning and diversifying governance models, organizations can reinforce trust and reduce fears of domination.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Domination is situated at this level because the concern reaches beyond individual careers or teams to the systemic integrity and autonomy of the organization itself. The worry is that dependence on powerful external actors could undermine strategic independence, ethical governance, or long-term stability.

(AI is emotionless)

This taboo is driven by the belief that AI systems, especially those controlled by distant powers, lack the human empathy or moral grounding needed for fair governance. The absence of emotional judgment in these systems amplifies fears that decisions will prioritize profit or control over people's well-being.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences



Ep
Emptiness

Emptiness

AI gets things done but leaves me emotionally flat

Description

Emptiness captures the quiet disappointment users feel when AI tools perform well but fail to create any sense of connection or interaction. The system executes tasks accurately and efficiently, yet leaves no impression. It feels transactional, not relational. Users may miss the human gestures—warmth, acknowledgment, even friction—that make work feel alive. Emptiness isn’t about errors or cold tone; it’s about the vacuum of emotional presence in the interaction itself. Over time, this subtle void can reduce engagement, making even helpful tools feel lifeless and uninspiring.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo appears when employees use AI tools that complete tasks—drafting text, generating answers, organizing tasks—but leave users feeling disengaged. They might say, “It works, but there’s no spark,” or “It’s like interacting with a form.” Users may manually reword AI text to add personality or avoid AI altogether in moments that feel emotionally important. Even in successful outcomes, they feel something is missing: humor, encouragement, expression. Emptiness leads people to switch back to human interactions when they want a sense of shared experience.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Emptiness, organizations should humanize the AI experience—not by pretending AI is human, but by making it feel less sterile. Add elements of tone variation, visual expression, or narrative flow to outputs. Provide simple ways to personalize phrasing or voice. Allow people to opt in to more expressive modes of response. Highlight moments where a human could offer input or closure. Leaders should model when it’s okay to use AI and when human contact adds value. The goal is to make tools feel supportive, not mechanical—especially in routines that people perform every day.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

This discomfort is emotional but contained. It affects how individuals experience their tools day to day, not how they relate to teammates or decisions. Users don’t resist AI out of fear or ethical concern—they simply feel uninspired or unmoved, making this a low-grade but persistent form of disengagement.

(People prefer human interaction)

The belief behind Emptiness is that human interactions—however imperfect—offer tone, energy, and connection that AI lacks. The resistance is not rooted in logic, but in a subtle preference for human touch, even in basic tasks. AI can do the job, but it can’t make the interaction feel meaningful.



AI is too
Autonomous

Encroachment

Fear of AI taking over most of your work

Description

Encroachment represents the profound fear that AI systems will gradually take over core aspects of one's job, leaving little room for meaningful human contribution. This taboo is not about the total replacement of roles but the creeping takeover of valuable, skill-based tasks that once defined professional identity. It speaks to the anxiety of watching one's expertise sidelined or devalued as automation expands its reach. The emotional discomfort arises from feeling that the "interesting," creative, or judgment-based elements of work are being stripped away, leaving behind only administrative oversight or maintenance tasks. At its core, Encroachment is about the fear of irrelevance and the loss of purpose within one's role.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Encroachment surfaces when employees express frustration about AI systems taking over complex decision-making or creative problem-solving that they previously handled. You might hear statements like, "Soon there'll be nothing left for me to do but monitor the machine," or "What's the point of my experience if the system decides everything?" This taboo can manifest as disengagement from AI projects, skepticism toward automation initiatives, or reluctance to participate in digital transformation efforts. It may also lead to lower morale and withdrawal from collaborative problem-solving when team members feel their input is no longer valued.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Encroachment, organizations should foster clear communication about which tasks AI is designed to augment rather than replace. Emphasize co-creation between humans and machines, ensuring that AI is seen as a partner, not a competitor. Offer pathways for employees to adapt their roles, focusing on areas where human judgment, creativity, and interpersonal skills remain irreplaceable. Provide training on AI fluency, helping individuals understand how to work effectively alongside technology. Leaders should engage openly with teams about how automation strategies are defined and implemented, inviting input on role evolution. By reinforcing the value of human expertise and designing AI to enhance—not dominate—workflows, companies can ease the fears linked to Encroachment.

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



En

Encroachment

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort in Encroachment is placed at this level because it directly threatens an individual's sense of long-term career viability and role definition. The fear is not just about current tasks but about the erosion of meaningful work and the need to fundamentally reconsider one's professional future.

(AI is too autonomous)

This taboo is fueled by the belief that highly autonomous AI systems will expand their control over job functions without human input, sidelining individuals and reducing opportunities for human agency. The autonomy of these systems intensifies fears that valuable work will be quietly absorbed by technology.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Ed

Endangerment

Endangerment

The fact that AI puts certain professions under pressure

Description

Endangerment reflects the widespread fear that AI systems and automation place entire professions under existential pressure. This taboo is rooted in the belief that technology could erode or even eliminate key professional roles, threatening the survival of fields where human expertise, empathy, and personal engagement have historically been central. It's not simply about job loss at the individual level—it's about the long-term risk that entire career paths or industries may become obsolete. The discomfort arises from the anxiety that irreplaceable human contributions, especially those built on trust and interpersonal relationships, are being undervalued and pushed aside in favor of efficiency-driven automation.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Endangerment surfaces when entire professions—especially knowledge-based fields like medicine, law, journalism, or education—fear losing their respected role in society due to AI. These professions have long been valued for judgment, expertise, and human connection. This taboo shows up in collective resistance, with professionals questioning whether automation erodes the integrity and societal importance of their work. Concerns focus less on individual job loss and more on the survival, relevance, and recognition of the profession itself.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Endangerment, organizations should engage directly with affected professions, acknowledging their fears and inviting them into the conversation about how AI is deployed. Promote models where technology augments rather than replaces human work, clearly identifying the unique value that professionals bring. Support skill evolution by offering targeted reskilling and cross-functional learning opportunities. Involve professional associations and ethics bodies in shaping AI implementation strategies, ensuring that automation respects the integrity and contributions of these fields. Communicate transparently about the limits of AI and where human input remains essential. By aligning AI strategies with the preservation of human dignity and expertise, companies can reduce resistance and foster constructive dialogue.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Endangerment belongs at this level because it addresses systemic risks—not just to individuals, but to entire professions and the organizational ecosystems that depend on them. The concern goes beyond roles and skills, raising existential questions about the future viability of core sectors.

(People Prefer Human Interaction)

This taboo is driven by the belief that human-centered work requires empathy, relational understanding, and emotional intelligence—qualities that AI lacks. The fear is that replacing these roles with automation not only removes human jobs but also erases the value of interpersonal connection.



AI is too
Opaque

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Em
Enmeshment

Enmeshment

Fear that AI hides critical dependencies and entangles the organization in systems it no longer understands

Description

Enmeshment captures the discomfort organizations feel when AI systems become so deeply embedded that no one fully understands how they work—or what they depend on. This taboo reflects the fear that beneath every output lies a dense web of hidden logic, third-party tools, silent updates, and black-box dependencies. Over time, the system runs—but no one can explain what powers it, what could break it, or who owns the risks. People fear that the organization has become entangled in something vast and unknowable. The issue isn't opacity of one feature—it's structural ignorance of the whole.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when people say, “We don’t know what’s driving that number,” or “If this breaks, we’re in trouble and won’t know why.” IT teams may lose track of layered model dependencies, product leaders may avoid altering automated flows, and legal teams may hesitate to approve AI-driven initiatives because the logic is untraceable. When asked to explain or audit a result, staff defer or deflect. Teams rely on outputs they can’t unpack, even when decisions are high-stakes. Resistance appears through stalled governance, frozen updates, or hesitance to scale because no one truly understands the system’s inner shape.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Enmeshment, organizations must make technical and process transparency a first-order design goal. Map how systems connect—models, APIs, third-party services—and update those maps regularly. Create internal audit paths not just for outputs, but for structure and origin. Design handoffs that explain not just the “what,” but the “why” and “how.” Invest in documentation, not just deployment. Empower non-technical teams to ask: “Where does this come from?” and “What do we depend on?” Normalize the expectation that AI systems be not only explainable—but exposable in their full complexity. Clarity is not overhead—it’s infrastructure.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

This taboo reflects fear that the organization has lost its ability to explain or control what it runs on. The entanglement isn’t technical—it’s existential. When no one understands the system’s dependencies, trust collapses. The organization becomes fragile under the weight of its own unseen complexity.

(AI is too opaque)

The discomfort stems from the belief that AI obscures its structure, origins, and connections. The system works, but no one can trace its logic, reveal its inputs, or diagnose failure. People don’t fear what’s visible—they fear what’s buried, concealed, or unknowable.



AI is too
Inflexible

Level 4
Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety

Es
Escalation

Escalation

The feeling that algorithms put increasing work demands on employees

Description

Escalation refers to the anxiety that AI systems and algorithmic management may continuously increase work demands on employees, making expectations higher without matching support or resources. This taboo captures the fear that automation does not relieve workload but instead raises the bar—expecting faster responses, tighter deadlines, and constant availability. The discomfort comes from the sense that human capacity is being pushed to its limits by systems that optimize for efficiency without regard for well-being. Rather than feeling supported by technology, employees feel trapped in a cycle where algorithms dictate performance expectations, leaving little room for flexibility or balance.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Escalation shows up when employees report that automated scheduling, task allocation, or performance monitoring tools are driving unrealistic work expectations. Statements like, “The system keeps assigning more because it thinks I can handle it” or “I feel like I’m racing against the algorithm” are signs of this taboo. It may manifest through rising burnout, turnover, or resentment toward AI-enabled processes. Teams may disengage from automation initiatives if they feel these systems overlook the human limits of energy, creativity, and time. Escalation often contributes to a toxic work culture where speed and quantity are rewarded over thoughtful, sustainable contributions.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Escalation, organizations should design AI systems with human-centered guardrails that prevent overload. Establish clear limits on automation-driven task allocation and ensure that employees can negotiate workloads. Integrate feedback mechanisms so that workers can flag when algorithmic expectations become unsustainable. Promote a culture where well-being, rest, and balanced productivity are prioritized over speed alone. Encourage managers to review and adjust AI-generated plans rather than accepting them as final. By aligning algorithmic processes with humane work principles, companies can reduce resistance and foster a healthier, more engaged workforce.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

This taboo aligns with this level because the fear goes beyond daily workflow frustrations—it directly affects long-term job sustainability and personal well-being. The anxiety is rooted in concerns about being unable to meet escalating demands or being judged unfairly by rigid systems.

(AI is too inflexible)

Escalation is driven by the belief that AI systems lack the flexibility to adapt to human rhythms, context, or personal circumstances. Employees fear that these systems enforce strict rules and expectations without room for discretion, empathy, or adjustment.



AI is too
Inflexible

Exaggeration

Belief that AI is just hype

Description

Exaggeration reflects the skepticism and frustration that arises when employees perceive AI as overhyped and disconnected from the practical realities of their work. This taboo is rooted in the belief that AI promises more than it can deliver, leading to inflated expectations and disappointment. Instead of being seen as a genuine solution, AI becomes associated with buzzwords and unrealistic claims. The discomfort comes from the perception that these exaggerated narratives dismiss the complexity of real-world tasks and oversimplify challenges that require adaptability, context-awareness, and human judgment.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Exaggeration surfaces when teams roll their eyes at AI discussions or sarcastically refer to automation initiatives as “another shiny toy” or “just another gimmick.” It often manifests as passive resistance, disengagement from digital transformation programs, or frustration when AI tools fail to meet daily operational needs. Employees might avoid using AI systems they consider ineffective or irrelevant, preferring traditional methods instead. This taboo may also emerge during strategy meetings where hype-driven claims about AI benefits clash with the experience of frontline staff who face its limitations firsthand.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Exaggeration, organizations should ground AI discussions in practical examples and real outcomes rather than hype. Focus on transparent communication about what AI can—and cannot—do. Encourage honest assessments of AI performance, including limitations and failure points, to foster credibility. Involve end-users early in design, testing, and feedback loops to ensure that solutions align with actual needs. Provide use cases that demonstrate incremental success rather than sweeping claims. By connecting AI efforts to meaningful, realistic benefits, organizations can shift perceptions away from hype and toward trusted, valuable innovation.

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Eg
Exaggeration

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort in Exaggeration sits at this level because it primarily disrupts collaboration and team dynamics, creating tension between leadership enthusiasm and employee skepticism. The issue does not directly threaten job security but hinders cooperation and shared commitment to AI initiatives.

(AI is too inflexible)

This taboo is fueled by the belief that AI systems are too rigid to handle real-world complexity and nuance. When overpromised capabilities fail to deliver flexible solutions, the perception of hype deepens, reinforcing resistance.



AI is too
Opaque

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Et
Extinction

Extinction

Fear that AI will make traditional career paths obsolete

Description

Extinction captures the existential fear that AI will not merely change jobs but will completely erase certain career paths. This taboo speaks to the anxiety that entire fields of work—those once seen as stable, respected, and meaningful—will no longer exist because machines will take over their function entirely. The discomfort lies in the belief that these professions won't evolve but will vanish, leaving no future for those who once aspired to enter them. This concern is not about adjusting roles or workflows; it is about the disappearance of industries and the long-term implications for skills, education, and generational career choices.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Extinction surfaces when leaders or educators openly advise against pursuing certain career paths due to predictions of full automation. Statements like, “There won’t be any need for that job in a few years,” or “That profession is dying because of AI,” reflect this fear. It manifests through declining enrollment in academic programs, reduced investment in specific skill areas, and strategic decisions to shutter entire departments. This taboo fosters a sense of hopelessness about the viability of once-secure professions, leading to disengagement, reduced mentoring, and a lack of investment in future talent for these roles.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Extinction, organizations should engage in honest dialogue about the future of work and the real trajectory of automation. Focus on scenario planning that includes pathways for job reinvention rather than total replacement. Partner with educational institutions to evolve curricula toward emerging hybrid roles that combine human insight with AI capabilities. Provide career coaching and retraining programs that help employees transition into new areas where their skills can be re-applied. Be transparent about the intentions behind AI deployment, making clear distinctions between automation, augmentation, and obsolescence. By fostering adaptability and future-focused career development, organizations can counter the narrative of Extinction and help rebuild hope.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Extinction aligns with this level because the concern goes beyond individual jobs to threaten the long-term viability of entire fields and organizational functions. It raises structural questions about business models, workforce planning, and societal contribution.

(AI is too opaque)

This taboo is driven by the belief that opaque AI systems could accelerate the decline of career paths without transparent reasoning or public debate. The inability to clearly understand how and why these changes are happening deepens the sense of inevitability and helplessness.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Xt
Extraction

Extraction

AI takes knowledge without the relationships

Description

Extraction captures the discomfort professionals feel when AI systems pull knowledge from their work—notes, messages, or patterns—without participating in the human relationships that created it. The system benefits from shared effort but offers nothing back in terms of presence, gratitude, or connection. Over time, this creates resentment: people feel mined, not valued. Extraction is not about privacy—it's about emotional dissonance. When people give their best thinking to a system that doesn't acknowledge their role, they begin to pull back, guarding effort that once flowed freely in trusted human relationships.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when teams notice AI tools learning from collaborative work without being part of the team. People might say, “It takes what we do, but it’s not part of us,” or “The system just absorbs everything—like a sponge with no face.” Professionals may stop sharing insights openly or avoid writing detailed notes, knowing they’re feeding a tool that offers no connection in return. Resistance grows not from fear of surveillance, but from feeling emotionally bypassed—when human knowledge flows in one direction, toward a system that remains socially absent.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Extraction, organizations should reframe how AI learns from human collaboration. Make visible how contributions are used, and credit the people behind the insights. Embed prompts that invite human recognition, responses, or reflection alongside system learning. Where AI benefits from ongoing team input, design moments for it to express acknowledgment—through summaries, feedback loops, or facilitator roles. Encourage teams to decide which types of knowledge-sharing feel too personal for automatic capture. Building interaction around learning—not just data—restores a sense of presence and fairness in collaborative work.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

This discomfort fits Level 3 because it challenges fairness in shared intellectual labor. When AI gains value from work created through human relationships—yet remains emotionally disengaged—trust in the system’s role begins to break down.

(People prefer human interaction)

This taboo stems from the belief that knowledge-sharing is not just transactional—it’s relational. People expect interaction, context, or acknowledgment in return for their contributions. When AI absorbs without relating, it violates unspoken norms of mutual presence.



AI is too
Opaque

Exposure

Fear of unauthorized AI decisions impacting company reputation

Description

Exposure reflects the anxiety that AI systems could make unauthorized or inappropriate decisions that damage a company's reputation. This taboo is rooted in the fear that opaque algorithms may take actions or produce outcomes without human oversight, leading to public mistakes, ethical breaches, or legal consequences. The discomfort comes from the sense that once damage is done—whether through biased outputs, faulty recommendations, or harmful messaging—the organization may have little recourse to repair trust. It reflects a deep worry about losing control over brand integrity and stakeholder relationships due to the unpredictable behavior of autonomous systems.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Exposure becomes evident when employees or leaders question whether AI tools could act in ways that compromise the company's image. Comments like, "What if the algorithm makes a call we can't explain?" or "How do we prevent this from backfiring publicly?" signal this concern. This taboo often arises during risk assessments, ethics reviews, or discussions about customer-facing automation. Teams may push back on AI adoption for sensitive tasks like client communication, marketing, or hiring due to fears that algorithmic decisions could expose the company to scandal or backlash. It frequently leads to demands for more transparency, explainability, and human approval steps before AI outputs are actioned.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Exposure, organizations should prioritize explainability and accountability in AI system design and deployment. Implement clear governance structures that define who is responsible for AI decisions, especially in sensitive areas like hiring, marketing, or customer service. Introduce human-in-the-loop processes where critical outputs are reviewed and approved before being actioned. Conduct rigorous risk assessments and scenario planning for AI-driven decisions, including potential reputational fallout. Communicate openly with stakeholders about safeguards, audit mechanisms, and ethical standards. By making AI processes transparent and controllable, companies can reduce anxiety about Exposure and strengthen confidence in their digital strategies.

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Ex
Exposure

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Exposure fits at this level because the risk goes beyond operational issues to threaten the organization's reputation, ethical standing, and long-term viability. A public AI-related failure can undermine stakeholder trust, brand loyalty, and regulatory compliance, placing the company itself at risk.

(AI is too opaque)

This taboo is driven by the belief that AI systems operate as "black boxes," making decisions that are difficult to interpret, challenge, or justify. The opacity of these systems amplifies fears that harmful outcomes could occur without early detection or clear accountability.



AI is too
Autonomous

Favoritism

Technology giving an unfair edge to organizations with certain skills

Description

Favoritism captures the fear that AI technologies give an unfair advantage to certain organizations over others, amplifying inequality based on access to technical expertise, data, or infrastructure. This taboo is rooted in the perception that success in the AI era depends not on business integrity, creativity, or human skill, but on the ability to leverage advanced technology—something not equally available to all. The discomfort comes from the sense that AI systems may “favor” companies with larger tech budgets, elite talent pools, or proprietary datasets, creating structural disadvantages for others. The concern is not about competition itself, but about the perceived automation of bias into the market.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Favoritism shows up when leaders, teams, or smaller competitors question whether AI adoption is rigging the game in favor of dominant players. You may hear frustrations like, “We can’t compete with their data advantage,” or “Only the tech giants can afford to make this work.” This taboo becomes especially visible in sectors where scale, data control, and technical specialization dictate who benefits most from automation. It can lead to disengagement from AI initiatives, reluctance to invest in innovation, or calls for regulation to level the playing field. The underlying tone is one of resentment and skepticism toward the fairness of digital transformation.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Favoritism, organizations and policymakers should advocate for equitable AI access and transparent standards. Consider collaborative data-sharing initiatives, ethical sourcing of training data, and open-source tooling to level the playing field. Encourage procurement practices that evaluate fairness, not just performance. Internally, companies can foster awareness of how automation choices affect competitive dynamics and seek partnerships that balance expertise and opportunity. Regulators can explore frameworks that prevent monopolization of AI benefits. By promoting fairness in the ecosystem, organizations can reduce resentment and foster broader trust in AI-driven innovation.

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Fa
Favoritism

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Favoritism fits at this level because it raises systemic concerns about competitive fairness, market access, and survival. When companies believe the deck is stacked by technology itself, trust in the market’s integrity—and in innovation—can collapse.

(AI is too autonomous)

This taboo is fueled by the belief that autonomous AI systems can scale advantages for certain players without accountability or human discretion. The systems may entrench unfair dynamics by amplifying the benefits of scale, data, or computational power, deepening inequality.



AI is too
Opaque

Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences



Fg
Fogginess

Fogginess

The AI output is unclear or hard to follow

Description

Fogginess captures the quiet frustration users feel when AI systems produce results that are vague, abstract, or difficult to interpret. The discomfort is not about error, risk, or unfairness, but about the cognitive burden of making sense of unclear output. People may understand that the answer is correct—but still feel like they’re squinting through a haze to grasp what it means. This friction builds emotional distance. When AI phrasing is confusing or overly technical, users disengage or seek human clarification. Fogginess represents the kind of opacity that causes confusion, not concern—yet it still erodes trust and usability over time.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo shows up when users stare at a summary and say, “What is that actually telling me?” or when they copy AI responses into another tool just to rephrase them. It’s especially common in recommendation tools, dashboards, and AI-generated language that tries to sound formal or neutral but ends up sounding empty. Employees might ignore helpful suggestions simply because they don’t understand the framing. Others rewrite AI text to make it clearer or “more human.” Fogginess doesn’t stop people from using the tool—it just slows them down and makes them work around it.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Fogginess, organizations should prioritize clarity in how AI presents results. Focus on plain language, actionable phrasing, and visual formatting that guides attention. Use examples, highlights, or follow-up questions to add meaning. Provide settings that let users adjust tone and complexity. Encourage teams to report phrases they find confusing and create internal style guides for AI-generated output. When people feel like the system is speaking their language—not just completing tasks—they engage more confidently and require less hand-holding. Making AI feel understandable is just as important as making it accurate.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort caused by Fogginess is practical, not social or systemic. It frustrates users at the moment of interaction, making their individual tasks harder to complete. The emotional impact is light—people keep using the system, but do so with less patience and more effort.

(AI is too opaque)

This taboo is rooted in the belief that AI hides its usefulness behind unclear presentation. The logic may be accessible, but the wording or format prevents users from grasping it. That lack of interpretability—despite access to the output—makes the AI feel vague and inaccessible.



AI is too
Inflexible

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Fr
Fragility

Fragility

Over-reliance on AI creating systemic fragility

Description

Fragility reflects the concern that over-reliance on AI systems creates hidden weaknesses within organizational processes, making them vulnerable to failure when flexibility or human judgment is most needed. This taboo captures the anxiety that highly automated environments may appear efficient on the surface but lack the resilience to handle exceptions, crises, or unexpected complexity. The discomfort comes from the belief that when AI dictates too much of the workflow, the organization becomes brittle—optimized for ideal conditions but unable to adapt when reality diverges from the algorithm's assumptions.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Fragility surfaces when employees voice frustration that AI-driven systems fail to cope with unusual scenarios or edge cases. Comments like, “The system doesn’t know what to do when things go off-script,” or “We’re stuck when the algorithm can’t handle exceptions,” reflect this fear. It often manifests during operational disruptions where manual intervention is needed, but human capabilities have atrophied due to dependence on automation. Fragility can also show up in risk management conversations, where leaders express concern that systems optimized for efficiency might collapse under stress, leaving the organization exposed without contingency plans.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Fragility, organizations should design AI systems with built-in flexibility and maintain human expertise for oversight and exception handling. Establish clear protocols for when and how to override automated processes. Regularly stress-test AI workflows under varied scenarios to assess their resilience. Invest in cross-training so that human teams remain capable of stepping in when automation falters. Promote a mindset of agility, not blind trust in efficiency. By ensuring that AI augments rather than replaces adaptive problem-solving, companies can reduce systemic fragility and protect organizational stability.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Fragility is at this level because the concern targets the stability of the organization itself. Overdependence on inflexible systems can magnify risks, especially during crises, leading to operational breakdowns that threaten business continuity.

(AI is too inflexible)

This taboo is fueled by the belief that AI systems are designed for standardization and scale, not adaptability. When the system cannot flexibly respond to nuance or outliers, reliance on such rigidity amplifies systemic risk instead of managing it.



AI is
Emotionless

Hollowness

AI participates in team work but brings no presence

Description

Hollowness reflects the discomfort teams feel when AI systems are technically present in collaborative workflows, yet emotionally absent. The tool may deliver updates, monitor progress, or summarize conversations—but its presence feels hollow. It doesn’t acknowledge nuance, connection, or emotional tone. The result isn’t offensive—it’s empty. Hollowness is not about ignoring emotion; it’s about failing to bring anything emotionally real to shared space. Teams begin to view the AI not as a participant, but as an echo. It adds information but subtracts energy.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo appears when AI tools are embedded in chat channels, meetings, or project boards—commenting, flagging, or assigning, but never feeling “there.” People might say, “It replies, but it doesn’t engage,” or “It’s like having a shell of a teammate.” Teams begin writing around it, adding tone manually, or ignoring its prompts. AI-generated content may be rewritten just to feel more present or alive. The system doesn’t disrupt collaboration, but it does drain vitality. People keep working—but feel like the AI is a silent bystander.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Hollowness, design AI touchpoints to support emotional tone, not just transactional updates. Use more expressive framing, visual presence, or dynamic timing to signal awareness of interaction flow. Let teams personalize the “voice” of system responses. Allow low-friction human overrides that make messages feel more alive. Train teams to see where energy drops off and model engagement that reflects presence. The goal is not to make AI seem human—but to keep collaboration from feeling hollow when it joins in.

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Hw
Hollowness

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

This discomfort plays out in shared routines and team spaces, not in individual isolation. People notice the AI’s emotional emptiness most when they’re trying to coordinate, reflect, or support one another. It doesn’t derail collaboration, but it undermines group presence. Teams feel the need to step in and restore the tone the system fails to carry.

(AI is emotionless)

This taboo is driven by the belief that AI systems are emotionally blank—present but unfeeling. The AI may process input, but it does not respond in a way that reflects understanding or care. This lack of warmth stands out in collaborative contexts, where tone and presence are vital to team trust and cohesion.



AI is
Emotionless

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Ib
Imbalance

Imbalance

The feeling that technology gives unfair advantages for those with tech skills

Description

Imbalance captures the discomfort that arises when people feel that technology disproportionately rewards individuals with specific technical skills, leaving others sidelined regardless of their broader contributions or expertise. This taboo reflects the concern that as AI becomes more embedded in workflows, it shifts power dynamics toward those who can build, operate, or interpret these systems, reducing the value of other essential talents like leadership, creativity, customer understanding, or operational know-how. The emotional trigger is the sense that fairness and respect within teams are eroded when status, influence, or opportunity is tied too tightly to technical fluency alone.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Imbalance shows up when non-technical team members feel excluded from decision-making or strategic conversations because they lack data science or engineering skills. Comments like, “Unless you can code, your input doesn’t seem to count,” or “The tech people call the shots now,” reflect this sentiment. It manifests through growing divides between technical and non-technical roles, sometimes leading to disengagement, reduced collaboration, or resentment. People may feel pressured to acquire skills outside their expertise simply to maintain influence, while others feel their deep domain knowledge is undervalued or overlooked in favor of technical capability.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Imbalance, organizations should recognize and promote the value of diverse skills alongside technical expertise. Foster inclusive decision-making by ensuring that domain experts, operations leaders, and creative thinkers have clear roles and influence in AI projects. Offer learning programs that encourage cross-disciplinary fluency without requiring everyone to become technical experts. Highlight success stories where collaboration between technical and non-technical teams led to better outcomes. Design AI workflows that require input from multiple perspectives, not just technical validation. By elevating all forms of expertise, companies can reduce tension and foster mutual respect across roles.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

This taboo aligns with this level because it challenges fairness and respect within professional relationships. The issue is not existential but affects collaboration, inclusion, and trust between colleagues with different skill sets.

(AI is emotionless)

The discomfort in Imbalance is driven by the belief that AI systems, and the culture surrounding them, focus on technical outputs without valuing human judgment, empathy, or interpersonal strengths. This emphasis on logic over relational skill amplifies perceptions of unfairness.



AI is
Emotionless

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



Im
Impairment

Impairment

Concern that AI limits career growth for non-tech professionals

Description

Impairment reflects the fear that AI adoption may stall or restrict the career growth of non-technical professionals, limiting their future prospects and advancement opportunities. This taboo is rooted in the belief that as automation reshapes roles and workflows, non-tech contributions become less visible or less valued in promotion and hiring decisions. The discomfort arises from the perception that career pathways, once accessible through a range of skills, now disproportionately favor those with technical backgrounds—especially in leadership roles where strategic choices increasingly involve technology. The fear is not about daily collaboration, but about long-term career viability and upward mobility.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Impairment shows up when non-technical employees question their ability to remain competitive or grow into leadership positions in an AI-driven environment. Comments like, “You need a data background to get promoted here now,” or “Only tech profiles make it into strategy roles,” reflect this fear. It often appears in talent development discussions, succession planning, or when non-tech professionals hesitate to pursue internal growth because they feel blocked by shifting expectations. The taboo fosters career insecurity, discouraging non-technical employees from aspiring to higher positions or taking on innovation roles where AI is involved.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Impairment, organizations should ensure that career growth frameworks explicitly recognize a diversity of skills and leadership styles, not just technical expertise. Offer career pathways that value business acumen, team leadership, creativity, and relational skills alongside AI literacy. Provide upskilling options that help non-tech employees engage with AI initiatives without expecting full technical retraining. Design succession plans and leadership development programs that include a mix of profiles, reflecting the broad competencies required for strategic success. By reinforcing the importance of inclusive leadership and multi-disciplinary strengths, companies can reduce career anxiety and build confidence across their workforce.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

This taboo belongs at this level because the fear goes beyond team dynamics and fairness—it directly affects career security and future job definition. The anxiety is about professional advancement and long-term relevance in a changing work environment.

(AI is emotionless)

Impairment is driven by the belief that AI-centric systems and cultures prioritize technical capabilities while overlooking human qualities like leadership, experience, judgment, and relational skills. The absence of emotional consideration in these systems magnifies the sense of exclusion for non-tech professionals.



AI is
Emotionless



Ip
Impassivity

Impassivity

Preferring an AI-based boss over an emotional human boss

Description

Impassivity captures the uncomfortable idea that some employees might prefer AI-based leadership over human leadership due to frustrations with emotional volatility, favoritism, or inconsistency from human bosses. This taboo reflects the belief that AI systems, though impersonal, offer perceived fairness, predictability, and impartiality—qualities that can sometimes feel lacking in human management. The discomfort arises from the tension between the desire for empathy and the appeal of emotionally neutral decision-making. It challenges traditional notions of leadership by questioning whether emotional presence is always seen as an asset in managing people.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Impassivity surfaces when employees express trust in algorithmic decisions over human judgment, especially in performance evaluations, task assignments, or scheduling. Comments like, “At least the system doesn’t play favorites,” or “I’d rather have the algorithm decide than deal with my manager’s moods,” signal this taboo. It may appear in pulse surveys, informal conversations, or feedback channels where employees highlight the benefits of consistency over personal interaction. This dynamic can create unease among leaders, as it questions the value of emotional engagement and relational leadership in favor of neutrality.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Impassivity, organizations should support leadership development that balances emotional intelligence with fairness and consistency. Encourage managers to reflect on how their behavior impacts trust and engagement, offering coaching on constructive emotional expression and bias reduction. Where AI systems are used in people management, ensure they augment rather than replace human leadership, providing transparency into how decisions are made. Create open feedback loops where employees can safely discuss their experiences with both human and AI-based systems. By fostering leadership that combines empathy with fairness, organizations can respond to this taboo without defaulting to impersonal automation.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort in Impassivity fits this level because it disrupts traditional team dynamics and expectations about leadership but does not threaten job security or organizational stability. The challenge is about adjusting roles and leadership styles, not existential risks.

(AI is emotionless)

This taboo is driven by the belief that emotionless AI systems may offer fairer or more objective leadership outcomes than human leaders. The preference for consistency over emotional engagement is directly tied to the perception of AI as unbiased and unaffected by personal feelings.



AI is too
Inflexible

Inadequacy

Anxiety about relying on AI to appear more competent

Description

Inadequacy captures the anxiety that arises when individuals feel compelled to rely on AI tools to appear more competent or skilled than they truly feel. This taboo reflects the discomfort of leaning on automated systems to cover gaps in knowledge, speed, or decision-making ability—out of fear that their own capabilities might not measure up without technological support. The emotional trigger is a fear of exposure: that others may discover this dependence and judge the individual as less capable. Rather than empowering growth, the presence of AI in this context becomes a crutch that amplifies feelings of personal insufficiency.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Inadequacy surfaces when employees quietly over-rely on AI-driven tools for tasks they believe they should be able to perform independently. Comments like, “I wouldn’t know how to do this without the system,” or “The tool makes me look like I know more than I do,” reflect this anxiety. It can manifest in hesitancy to admit uncertainty, avoidance of deeper learning, or resistance to new challenges without automation support. This taboo often remains hidden, with individuals masking their dependence on AI to maintain the appearance of competence, potentially undermining skill development and confidence.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Inadequacy, organizations should focus on building confidence and capability alongside technology adoption. Encourage skill development programs that help employees understand the “why” behind automated processes, not just how to operate the tools. Promote a culture where asking questions, admitting uncertainty, and learning are valued over flawless execution. Position AI as a support for human judgment rather than a replacement for knowledge. Offer mentoring and peer learning opportunities that reinforce human expertise. By shifting the narrative from dependency to augmentation, companies can reduce anxiety and help employees feel competent and empowered with or without AI.

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



Ia

Inadequacy

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

This taboo fits at this level because the fear goes beyond daily task management—it touches long-term concerns about career legitimacy, skill erosion, and job security. The anxiety is about whether one's role can stand independently without AI assistance.

(AI is too inflexible)

Inadequacy is fueled by the belief that rigid, pre-configured AI systems may make people dependent on structured outputs rather than fostering flexible problem-solving skills. The inflexibility of AI reinforces the sense that without these tools, individuals might struggle to perform.

Indifference

AI feels cold when I want a human touch

Description

Indifference describes the subtle emotional discomfort users feel when AI delivers responses that are technically correct but emotionally empty. The issue is not about accuracy or tone mismatch, but the absence of a sense of care. In moments where users seek acknowledgment, encouragement, or even a hint of empathy, AI systems respond with clinical detachment. This creates the impression that no one is really “there.” Indifference reflects a gap between functionality and connection—the user feels like they’re interacting with a logic engine, not something that understands or respects their human presence.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when employees receive AI-generated messages in contexts that feel personal or sensitive—performance feedback, project delays, customer complaints—and the response lands as sterile or robotic. A user might say, “That’s not how a person would respond,” or “It just feels off.” They may rewrite messages to sound more human, or switch to manual communication channels. The AI isn’t offensive—it’s emotionally absent. Over time, this leads to quiet rejection of automated tools for tasks where users want to feel seen or understood, not just processed.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Indifference, organizations should identify AI touchpoints that deal with emotional or interpersonal content and enhance their warmth and relatability. Offer tone and message templates that feel more human. Train AI tools to mirror user tone or provide empathetic framing. Make it easy to switch to human support when the task or context feels personal. Leaders should avoid assigning emotionally charged tasks solely to automated systems and model thoughtful, human-centered communication themselves. When AI reflects a sense of presence—even lightly—users feel less like they’re being handled and more like they’re being helped.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences



Id
Indifference

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort caused by Indifference is individual and situational. It affects how people feel in the moment, not how they function in teams or perceive fairness. Users don’t abandon their tools—they just avoid them in contexts where they’d rather feel a human presence, making this a low-level but persistent barrier.

(People prefer human interaction)

This taboo is rooted in the belief that AI cannot replicate the emotional sensitivity or presence of another person. The resistance comes not from distrust or fear, but from a quiet preference for human warmth—especially in moments that feel relational, not procedural.



AI is too
Opaque

Inscrutability

Fear of AI decision-making lacking transparency

Description

Inscrutability captures the fear that AI decision-making processes are too opaque for people to understand, challenge, or trust. This taboo reflects deep discomfort with systems that operate as “black boxes,” where reasoning and logic are hidden from view. The concern is not just about unclear algorithms—it’s about the loss of agency, accountability, and the ability to question or learn from decisions that affect one’s work, career, or customers. The emotional trigger is the anxiety of being subject to processes that feel arbitrary or inaccessible, creating a sense of powerlessness and exclusion.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Inscrutability shows up when employees, managers, or stakeholders express doubts about how AI reaches its conclusions, especially in sensitive areas like performance evaluations, hiring, resource allocation, or customer recommendations. Comments like, “I don’t know why the system picked this option,” or “There’s no way to understand how it makes decisions,” are signs of this taboo. It can lead to hesitation in using AI outputs, reluctance to fully adopt the technology, or frustration when decisions can’t be explained to affected parties. This taboo often fosters mistrust between teams and AI designers or vendors.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Inscrutability, organizations should prioritize explainability and transparency in AI system design and deployment. Use interpretable models where possible and provide clear documentation of decision logic. Establish mechanisms for human review and override of automated decisions, especially in high-stakes contexts. Offer education on how AI models work and why certain methods were chosen. Foster a culture where questioning and scrutinizing AI recommendations is encouraged, not penalized. By demystifying AI and empowering users to engage critically with its outputs, companies can reduce anxiety and build trust.

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



In
Inscrutability

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

This taboo belongs at this level because the fear is not just about process clarity—it threatens confidence in career-impacting decisions. The anxiety is about losing control over outcomes that directly shape one’s role, growth, or job definition.

(AI is too opaque)

Inscrutability is driven by the belief that AI systems lack transparency by design. The inability to explain, audit, or understand these systems amplifies concerns about fairness, accountability, and professional legitimacy.

Isolation

AI eroding informal workplace camaraderie

Description

Isolation reflects the fear that AI systems may erode the informal social connections and camaraderie that make workplace culture feel human and enjoyable. This taboo focuses on the subtle ways technology can replace casual interactions—those spontaneous hallway conversations, shared coffee breaks, or collaborative problem-solving moments—that build trust and foster a sense of belonging. The discomfort arises from the perception that as work becomes more mediated by automated systems, the emotional and relational glue between colleagues weakens, leaving people feeling detached, transactional, and alone in their work experience.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Isolation surfaces when employees notice a decline in informal connections, with comments like, “We never have those casual chats anymore,” or “I feel like I’m just interacting with the system, not my team.” It becomes apparent in environments where workflows are fully automated or digitalized, leaving little room for human-to-human contact. This taboo can lead to lower morale, weaker team bonds, and a sense of loneliness at work. Employees may express reluctance to adopt AI solutions that further reduce opportunities for relationship-building, especially in collaborative or creative roles where interpersonal energy is key.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Isolation, organizations should intentionally create spaces—virtual or physical—where informal interactions can thrive alongside automated workflows. Encourage social rituals like coffee chats, team check-ins, or shared learning sessions that foster connection beyond task completion. Design AI tools to support, not replace, collaboration by integrating features that promote dialogue and human input. Train leaders to recognize and prioritize team bonding activities, especially when adopting new technologies. By safeguarding social fabric and nurturing interpersonal relationships, companies can reduce resistance and maintain the sense of community that drives engagement and well-being.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Is
Isolation

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort in Isolation fits this level because it disrupts everyday social dynamics and team cohesion, not job security or organizational structure. The challenge is about preserving meaningful collaboration and informal engagement in the face of automation.

(People Prefer Human Interaction)

This taboo is fueled by the belief that human connection is essential for a healthy, fulfilling work environment. AI systems, while efficient, cannot replicate the emotional exchange and relational bonding that come from human presence and spontaneity.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 4
Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety

La
Lagging

Lagging

Not being able to keep up with the pace of technological developments

Description

Lagging captures the fear of falling behind in an environment where technological advancements move faster than individual learning curves. This taboo reflects the anxiety that no matter how hard someone works, the rapid pace of innovation may leave them feeling outdated, inadequate, or irrelevant. The discomfort arises from the belief that professional growth is increasingly tied to keeping up with evolving technologies, even when one's core expertise lies elsewhere. This fear can undermine confidence, foster resistance to new tools, or create shame around learning gaps—especially among experienced professionals who feel displaced by younger, tech-savvy colleagues.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Lagging surfaces when employees express frustration, anxiety, or avoidance regarding digital upskilling. Comments like, “I just can’t keep up with all the new systems,” or “It feels like I’m always two steps behind,” are common indicators. It may appear in learning and development assessments, performance reviews, or team conversations about adopting new AI tools. The taboo can lead to passive resistance to innovation initiatives, withdrawal from learning opportunities, or reluctance to engage with emerging technologies altogether. It is especially visible when employees disengage from tech-driven projects out of fear of exposing their knowledge gaps.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Lagging, organizations should create learning environments that emphasize psychological safety and continuous growth over flawless performance. Offer tailored upskilling pathways that respect different learning speeds and styles, focusing on practical relevance rather than technical perfection. Promote mentoring and peer learning networks where knowledge-sharing bridges experience gaps. Recognize and value relational, strategic, and creative skills alongside technical fluency. Communicate clearly that adaptability, curiosity, and teamwork are as important as technical mastery. By normalizing learning as an ongoing process and respecting diverse strengths, companies can reduce anxiety and foster a more inclusive approach to innovation.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

This taboo aligns with this level because it threatens the individual’s sense of long-term professional viability. The anxiety is not about immediate collaboration but about the sustainability of one’s career and the ability to evolve with changing expectations.

(People Prefer Human Interaction)

Lagging is driven by the belief that continuous technology shifts devalue the relational, human aspects of expertise. The preference for human interaction becomes a refuge from the relentless demand to adapt to tools that feel alien or inaccessible.



AI is too
Opaque

Liability

Leaders and regulators don't understand AI decisions, creating legal risks.

Description

Liability reflects the fear that opaque AI decision-making processes expose organizations to significant legal and regulatory risks. This taboo centers on the discomfort leaders feel when they cannot fully understand, explain, or defend the logic behind AI-driven outcomes, particularly in sensitive areas like compliance, finance, hiring, or customer service. The concern is not just about technical complexity—it's about accountability. When decisions impact rights, fairness, or safety, and leadership cannot justify the rationale, the fear of lawsuits, penalties, and reputational damage becomes a major source of resistance to AI adoption.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Liability shows up when leaders hesitate to endorse AI solutions for fear of regulatory non-compliance or public backlash. Statements like, “How can we stand behind this decision if we don’t understand how it was made?” or “What if regulators ask us to explain the algorithm’s choice?” reflect this taboo. It often appears in legal reviews, risk assessments, or boardroom conversations about automation strategies. This fear can delay or block AI implementation entirely, particularly in industries like healthcare, banking, insurance, or HR where accountability standards are high.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Liability, organizations should prioritize explainability and auditability in AI design and deployment. Use interpretable models where possible and ensure thorough documentation of algorithmic logic. Engage legal, compliance, and risk teams early in the AI development process. Implement governance frameworks that clearly define accountability for AI-driven decisions. Consider third-party audits and transparency reports to demonstrate due diligence. Provide training for leaders and regulators to increase their understanding of AI systems. By aligning AI practices with legal expectations and ethical standards, companies can reduce liability fears and build confidence in their AI strategies.

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Lb
Liability

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Liability aligns with this level because it threatens not only operational integrity but the legal and ethical standing of the entire organization. The risk is systemic—failure to manage these concerns can lead to lawsuits, fines, and loss of stakeholder trust.

(AI is too opaque)

This taboo is driven by the belief that AI operates as a “black box,” making decisions that are difficult to audit, explain, or defend in legal contexts. The opacity of these systems intensifies concerns about responsibility and compliance.



AI is too
Inflexible

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Li
Lock-in

Lock-in

Fear that AI locks organizations into irreversible systems and choices

Description

Lock-in captures the discomfort leaders feel when adopting AI appears to commit the organization to an unchangeable path—technologically, operationally, or strategically. The concern is not about short-term cost or performance but about irreversible entanglement. AI systems may optimize a current model so tightly, or become so embedded in critical infrastructure, that any future pivot becomes impractical or unaffordable. People fear that what begins as innovation turns into entrapment. The taboo expresses anxiety that once AI is woven into the fabric of the business, the organization forfeits its ability to change course, adapt to shifts, or exit flawed strategies.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when people say, “If we go with this platform, we’ll never be able to switch,” or “We’re stuck optimizing the wrong model.” Teams may hesitate to implement AI solutions that require proprietary formats, external dependencies, or irreversible integration. IT leaders may delay decisions over fear that the first implementation locks in downstream architecture. Strategy teams may avoid committing to AI-driven approaches that seem to foreclose future experimentation. The discomfort grows when systems prove hard to unwind, retrain, or replatform—especially when decisions made now constrain flexibility years later.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Lock-in, organizations should approach AI implementation with reversibility in mind. Prioritize modular tools, transparent models, and open data practices that preserve exit options. Build in sunset clauses, retraining paths, and rollback mechanisms for critical systems. Ensure that strategic planning includes scenarios where change or departure from a system is necessary. Treat flexibility not as a bonus, but as a core design principle. Encourage decision-makers to ask not only “What will this system do?” but “What would it take to undo it?” Reducing lock-in risk builds confidence that AI enhances capability—without compromising future freedom.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

This taboo reflects institutional fear that AI decisions may become permanent fixtures. When systems shape infrastructure, contracts, and strategy with no clear exit, the organization risks losing its adaptability. The discomfort stems from seeing flexibility fade—replaced by dependence that feels irreversible, even when needs change or failures emerge.

(AI is too inflexible)

The discomfort arises from the belief that AI enforces rigid pathways, where once a system is embedded, it cannot be adapted or dismantled. This rigidity doesn’t just block change—it institutionalizes it. People resist committing to systems that are optimized for now but impossible to alter as the future unfolds.



AI is too
Inflexible

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Lp
Lockstep

Lockstep

AI forces us into the same rigid process

Description

Lockstep describes the frustration that emerges when AI tools rigidly enforce a standard sequence of steps, expectations, or workflows—regardless of team preferences or situational needs. The system demands consistency where teams want flexibility. What was once handled through informal coordination or creative adaptation now becomes locked into a strict pattern. This erodes the ability to improvise, combine roles, or negotiate responsibilities. Lockstep isn't just about personal frustration—it creates shared friction. It imposes structure in places where human collaboration depends on nuance, timing, and adjustment.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when AI tools dictate project flows, ticket systems, or review steps that don't reflect how the team actually works. A teammate might say, "We're stuck doing it that way because the AI expects it," or "We can't skip a step, even if it's irrelevant." Teams may work around the system using offline notes, alternate apps, or extra coordination just to maintain efficiency. The discomfort is not about rejecting AI—it's about rejecting the rigidity it imposes on how people move together.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Lockstep, organizations should design AI workflows with built-in flexibility. Allow teams to adjust, skip, or reorder steps based on context. Include "manual override" or "team choice" modes in structured processes. Train managers to recognize when rigidity is harming collaboration rather than helping it. Encourage feedback loops that identify where automation feels oppressive or unnecessary. AI should guide, not govern, how teams move through their work. When flexibility is preserved, adoption becomes far more natural.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort plays out in team-level behavior. Lockstep changes how people coordinate, share effort, and trust one another's judgment. It doesn't affect job roles or stability, but it introduces collaboration strain when teams can't flex to meet their own needs.

(AI is too inflexible)

This taboo reflects the belief that AI systems lack the ability to accommodate variation. The discomfort arises when users feel boxed in by a system that demands compliance over creativity—particularly in collaborative work, where flexibility is essential.



AI is
Emotionless

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Me
Mechanization

Mechanization

Loss of humanity in business practices

Description

Mechanization reflects the fear that AI-driven processes strip away the human spirit from business practices, reducing interactions, decisions, and values to cold, transactional operations. This taboo arises from the discomfort that efficiency and automation, while beneficial for productivity, risk eroding empathy, creativity, ethics, and relational depth. The emotional trigger lies in the fear that organizations may lose their moral compass and human-centered identity when machines increasingly dictate how work is performed and relationships are managed.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Mechanization shows up when employees, customers, or partners express that interactions with the organization feel robotic, impersonal, or uncaring. Comments like, “It feels like we’re just numbers to them now,” or “There’s no human touch left in our service,” signal this taboo. It may manifest through customer dissatisfaction, employee disengagement, or reputational damage as companies prioritize algorithms over human connection. In internal processes, teams may resist adopting AI tools that appear to devalue nuance, compassion, or judgment in favor of rigid metrics and automated outputs.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Mechanization, organizations should consciously embed human-centered values into AI design and implementation. Develop principles that ensure empathy, fairness, and respect remain at the core of automated processes. Balance automation with opportunities for meaningful human interaction, especially in customer-facing roles. Train employees to recognize when human judgment should override machine logic. Promote leadership models that value emotional intelligence alongside technological acumen. By reaffirming the importance of human dignity, ethics, and relational care, companies can use AI without sacrificing their humanity.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

This taboo fits at this level because it undermines the trust, loyalty, and emotional engagement that sustain organizations. When people feel dehumanized by AI-driven practices, companies risk damaging their brand, culture, and long-term viability.

(AI is emotionless)

Mechanization is driven by the belief that AI systems, by their very nature, lack emotional understanding and ethical sensitivity. The reliance on emotionless technology is seen as sacrificing the essential human values that underpin responsible and meaningful business practices.



AI is too
Inflexible

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Mf
Misfit

Misfit

AI ignores important human context

Description

Misfit reflects the discomfort that arises when AI applies rules or models that clash with the values, norms, or expectations of specific teams, cultures, or clients. The resistance emerges when systems behave as if everyone thinks the same way, erasing legitimate differences in communication, customs, or needs. Employees and users begin to reject tools that cannot adapt to their reality. Misfit is not about output failure—it's about moral, cultural, or contextual inappropriateness, causing people to distrust systems that feel misaligned with their work environment or lived experience.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo appears when users find that AI tools ignore the norms of their team, industry, or audience. Someone might say, “That’s not how we work here,” or “It doesn’t get our culture.” Misfit arises when AI insists on uniform behaviors that don’t match what people value—such as formal tone in casual environments, or rigid logic in client relationships that depend on empathy. Professionals may rework AI outputs, avoid sensitive automation features, or resist deployment altogether when they sense that the tool doesn’t respect or reflect the specific dynamics of their context.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Misfit, organizations should embed adaptability into AI design from the outset. Include diverse perspectives during development to identify cultural blind spots. Offer adjustable settings for tone, rules, or workflows tailored to different teams or regions. Empower users to flag mismatches and explain why context matters. Provide real-time feedback loops where human reviewers can intervene and teach the system when it gets context wrong. Leaders should regularly evaluate AI tools for fit across roles and regions—not just performance. The more a system reflects real-world nuance, the more it earns trust across varied work cultures.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

This taboo fits Level 3 because it concerns professional legitimacy and fairness. Misfit challenges the idea that AI can make decisions in ways that are ethically or contextually valid across environments. When the system’s behavior doesn’t align with workplace values, trust erodes and resistance grows.

(AI is too inflexible)

Misfit stems from the belief that AI systems cannot adapt to cultural or contextual variation. Users feel frustrated when rigid logic is applied in ways that ignore their norms or expectations. The discomfort arises not from errors, but from inflexibility that clashes with how people naturally work or communicate.



AI is too
Inflexible



Mi

Mismatch

Mismatch

AI doesn't adapt to my working style

Description

Mismatch describes the frustration users feel when AI systems fail to reflect or support their personal ways of working. The discomfort is not about mistrust or fear of AI, but about rigidity—tools that expect users to conform to a preset logic rather than adapting to individual habits, preferences, or workflows. The resistance comes from feeling like the system was built for someone else. Mismatch expresses a misalignment between how people think, organize, or act—and how the AI expects them to operate—creating subtle friction in everyday use.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Employees experience Mismatch when AI forces standard views, workflows, or data structures that don't align with their habits. A marketing analyst may prefer visual dashboards but find the AI insists on raw data tables. A team lead may want flexible scheduling but feel boxed in by automated planning tools. Common reactions include turning off features, bypassing AI suggestions, or reverting to manual methods. Users might comment, "It's not how I do things," or "I spend more time fixing what it sets up." The system's inability to learn or adjust fuels quiet rejection.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Mismatch, organizations should design AI with configurable options that reflect different work styles. Build adaptive interfaces that remember user preferences or allow meaningful customization. Include onboarding that learns from how individuals interact, and emphasize transparency in how suggestions are generated. Encourage feedback loops that let users shape outputs over time. Leaders should promote a culture where AI complements rather than replaces personal efficiency strategies. By showing that AI can flex with user needs, organizations reduce resistance and increase long-term adoption.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

This taboo fits Level 1 because the discomfort is tied to personal habits and preferences, not deeper workplace conflicts or career fears. It manifests in tool rejection and personal workarounds, but not in team disruption or professional mistrust.

(AI is too inflexible)

The belief behind this taboo is that AI systems operate with rigid assumptions, offering no flexibility to accommodate individual differences. The resistance is rooted in how inflexible design undermines a person's preferred approach to everyday work.



AI is too
Opaque

Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences



Mo
Monitoring

Monitoring

The loss of privacy from tech monitoring

Description

Monitoring reflects the discomfort individuals feel when AI technologies track, analyze, or predict their behaviors, often without their full understanding or consent. This taboo captures the anxiety that the use of monitoring tools in the workplace invades personal privacy, reduces autonomy, and turns daily work activities into data points for surveillance. The emotional trigger is the loss of control over one's own actions and intentions, with the fear that constant observation may lead to unfair judgments or penalties based on misunderstood or decontextualized information.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Monitoring surfaces when employees voice concerns about surveillance technologies embedded in workflows, such as productivity tracking software, AI-driven performance monitoring, or data collection tools. Comments like, "It feels like Big Brother is always watching," or "I'm afraid to take a break because the system might flag me," reveal this taboo. It often leads to reduced trust in management, reluctance to fully engage with monitored systems, and heightened stress or burnout. Employees may also develop workaround behaviors to avoid triggering AI-based alerts or evaluations.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Monitoring, organizations should be transparent about what data is collected, how it will be used, and why it matters. Implement clear privacy policies and give employees meaningful control over their own data where possible. Involve workers in the design of monitoring practices to ensure they are fair, limited, and context-sensitive. Focus on using AI tools to empower employees rather than penalize them, emphasizing coaching and support over surveillance. By building trust through transparency, fairness, and choice, companies can reduce resistance to monitoring technologies and foster a healthier, more respectful work environment.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort in Monitoring fits this level because it primarily affects individual comfort with how work is organized and supervised. The concern is about daily workflow autonomy, not career survival or organizational collapse.

(AI is too opaque)

Monitoring is fueled by the belief that AI-driven surveillance operates without transparent communication about what is being measured, how it is interpreted, or how it impacts outcomes. The lack of clarity deepens feelings of vulnerability and mistrust.



AI is too
Inflexible



Ng
Nagging

Nagging

AI keeps prompting me in unwanted ways

Description

Nagging describes the frustration users feel when AI systems repeatedly prompt or remind them to take actions in ways that feel inflexible or intrusive. The discomfort arises not only from the frequency of these prompts, but also from the system's refusal to adjust—even after users indicate that the prompts or outcomes are unhelpful or incorrect. Instead of adapting to feedback, the AI insists—delivering the same messages, reminders, or suggestions as if no correction was given. Over time, this creates emotional resistance, as users begin to feel ignored and patronized by a system that appears to nag rather than assist. It reflects a subtle power struggle over who controls the timing and logic of work, made worse by the AI's inability to learn or back off.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo shows up when employees groan at pop-ups, dismiss notifications without reading, or complain about constant nudges to “review,” “respond,” or “complete” a task. A user might comment, “It won’t leave me alone,” or “I get the same alert every day—I’ve stopped looking.” The issue is not the message, but that the AI insists regardless of priorities or workflow. Employees may disable features, mute channels, or avoid the tool entirely. Nagging becomes a quiet, emotional protest against systems that don’t take “no” for an answer or fail to sense when enough is enough.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Nagging, organizations should give users direct control over when and how AI prompts appear. Systems should include intuitive settings for adjusting frequency, tone, and content of reminders. Features like “snooze,” “mute,” or “dismiss permanently” empower users to manage their attention and workflow without conflict. Developers should build dynamic prompting mechanisms that learn from user behavior—delaying, modifying, or stopping prompts based on engagement patterns. Leaders can promote a culture that frames AI suggestions as helpful aids, not instructions. Transparent communication about how reminders are triggered, and why, can ease frustration. When users feel that their preferences shape how the AI interacts with them, their resistance drops, and trust in the system grows.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort caused by Nagging remains confined to personal experiences and individual tool usage. People may feel annoyed or burdened by constant prodding, but their trust in colleagues, the fairness of decisions, or the stability of their job is not affected. The irritation builds around habits and convenience rather than deeper fears or conflicts.

(AI is too inflexible)

This taboo stems from a belief that AI systems lack the flexibility to respond to personal context or feedback. Instead of adjusting to how often a user engages, the system keeps delivering the same prompts. The inflexible nature of these reminders—unable to scale back, skip, or adapt—drives the feeling that the AI is unresponsive and repetitive.



AI is too
Opaque

Obscurity

AI decisions are visible but not explained.

Description

Obscurity reflects the discomfort that arises when AI-driven decisions are visible in their outcomes but remain unexplained in their rationale. People know AI is being used—they see its effects—but feel left in the dark about why certain choices were made. This taboo is not about hiding the existence of AI, but about withholding understandable explanations once AI is in play. The emotional trigger is the sense of being subject to processes that feel arbitrary, inaccessible, or unfair, undermining trust and leaving individuals feeling excluded from meaningful dialogue about decisions that impact them.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Obscurity surfaces when employees, customers, or stakeholders question decisions but find no clear answers. Comments like, “They told me AI was used, but no one can explain why this was the result,” or “It’s just ‘the system decided’ and that’s it,” reflect this taboo. It typically appears during high-stakes processes such as promotions, resource allocations, project selections, or customer service escalations. Obscurity breeds frustration and resentment because people are aware that technology is involved but are denied transparency about how and why outcomes were determined.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Obscurity, organizations must ensure that when AI is used, clear, simple, and accessible explanations are available. Provide understandable rationales for decisions and maintain open channels for questions and feedback. Offer basic AI literacy programs that demystify key processes without overwhelming technical details. Build governance mechanisms that require human review for sensitive decisions and give individuals the right to appeal or seek clarification. By respecting the need for transparency around how decisions are made—not just that they are made—organizations can rebuild trust and reduce resistance.

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



Ob

Obscurity

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort in Obscurity fits this level because the lack of accessible explanations affects people's confidence in the fairness of career progression, role stability, and the legitimacy of key decisions. It triggers concerns about being unfairly treated without recourse.

(AI is too opaque)

Obscurity stems from the belief that AI systems are structured in ways that obscure their internal logic from users and stakeholders. Even when AI's presence is known, its opacity blocks understanding, reinforcing feelings of exclusion and distrust.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Of
Offloading

Offloading

Using AI for tasks that others expect us to do ourselves

Description

Offloading captures the fear that AI systems encourage individuals and organizations to surrender too much responsibility for decisions, actions, and outcomes. This taboo reflects the discomfort that, as more tasks are automated, people may become passive, disengaged, or overly trusting of machine outputs, weakening human accountability. The emotional trigger lies in the sense that critical thinking, ethical judgment, and personal ownership are being eroded, as responsibilities once carried by individuals are quietly transferred to automated systems without sufficient reflection or oversight.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Offloading shows up when employees or leaders start deferring important judgments entirely to AI tools without questioning, validating, or contextualizing their outputs. Comments like, “The system made the call, so it’s not on me,” or “We’ll just do what the tool recommends,” indicate this mindset. It often manifests in risk-averse behavior where individuals use AI as a shield to avoid responsibility for mistakes. This taboo can result in lower quality decisions, reduced professional confidence, and greater organizational vulnerability when automated processes fail or miss critical nuances.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Offloading, organizations should emphasize that AI is a tool to support, not replace, human responsibility. Establish clear frameworks that define when human judgment must intervene, particularly in critical decisions. Train employees to critically assess AI outputs and encourage a culture of active accountability. Use case studies that show the risks of blind automation and the importance of human oversight. Reinforce the message that ethical, contextual, and leadership responsibilities can never be fully delegated to machines. By reaffirming the primacy of human accountability, organizations can prevent overreliance and maintain trust in both people and technology.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort in Offloading fits this level because it affects not just daily work but long-term professional identity and value. As responsibility is shifted to systems, individuals worry about their relevance, credibility, and their role in shaping important outcomes.

(People prefer human interaction)

The discomfort arises from the belief that responsibility should remain human—not just procedurally, but relationally. People expect real decisions to reflect care, presence, and accountability. When AI replaces that presence, it feels like the system is making choices no one stands behind. Trust erodes when judgment becomes impersonal.



AI is too
Autonomous

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Oh
Overhaul

Overhaul

Fear that AI is redesigning core business structures without human oversight

Description

Overhaul captures the discomfort that arises when AI begins to reconfigure the fundamental architecture of a business—how decisions are made, how roles are defined, and how processes interconnect—without deliberate human design. The concern is not just about automation, but about silent structural transformation. AI systems gradually alter how the business functions, making legacy systems, workflows, or hierarchies obsolete without clear consensus. People fear that leadership, culture, and strategy are being overwritten not by intent, but by optimization logic. The taboo reflects a sense of being managed by a machine vision of the company rather than a human one.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when employees say, “We didn’t agree to change this—it just shifted,” or “The system is running the show now.” Teams may discover that decision rights have migrated, reporting lines have changed, or departmental priorities have shifted—without any formal announcement or discussion. Strategy meetings start following the logic of AI forecasts instead of human planning. Leaders may feel their influence reduced as automation slowly hardwires operational norms. The discomfort grows when AI-driven adjustments feel irreversible or invisible, making people unsure who is actually shaping the direction of the organization.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Overhaul, organizations should make structural shifts transparent and intentional. Map where AI is influencing core processes or reassigning operational logic. Invite cross-functional reviews of how AI impacts planning, governance, or reporting. Reinforce that design decisions must come from leadership—not emerge unexamined from data flows. Build guardrails that separate efficiency upgrades from organizational redesign. Where change is needed, frame it as a choice, not a default. By reclaiming authorship of structure, companies can restore clarity, coherence, and control over who they are and how they evolve.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort reflects deep anxiety about the loss of strategic authorship. It affects not just one function or team, but the perceived integrity and direction of the entire organization. When AI silently reshapes core systems, it triggers fears about coherence, alignment, and long-term control. People worry that what defines the business—its vision, values, and structure—is being edited without human leadership.

(AI is too autonomous)

This taboo stems from the belief that AI systems are operating with too much unchecked authority—redesigning without consultation, surfacing patterns as decisions, and embedding new norms by default. The discomfort isn’t about technical overreach; it’s about structural drift happening outside the bounds of intentional governance.



AI is too
Opaque

Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences



OI
Overload

Overload

Too much data, not enough clarity

Description

Overload describes the frustration people feel when AI systems deliver large amounts of data or output, but fail to make it clear what matters most. The issue is not the accuracy of the data, but the lack of prioritization or explanation. Users are left facing dashboards, predictions, and scores without guidance, and the result is mental fatigue. The system appears to “dump” information without filtering or interpreting it. This creates emotional resistance—people disengage from AI tools that overwhelm them, even if the information is technically useful. It reflects a quiet pushback against systems that confuse more than they clarify.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo shows up when employees ignore AI dashboards, skip summaries, or ask colleagues instead of using automated tools. Users may say, “It gives me everything but tells me nothing,” or “I don’t have time to figure this out.” When AI offers long explanations, dense visuals, or too many options, users experience cognitive overload and check out. They may rely on intuition, revert to old habits, or ask for simpler versions of the data. Overload is not rejection of AI—but rejection of how AI presents itself.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Overload, designers should focus on simplifying AI outputs and prioritizing what users need to know. Use visual hierarchy, summaries, and default views that emphasize action or relevance. Offer progressive disclosure—where more detail is available, but not required upfront. Let users personalize their views and pin their most relevant metrics. Train teams on how to interpret outputs, and create spaces for feedback on what’s overwhelming. Leaders should make it clear that understanding, not just access to data, is the goal. When users feel AI helps them focus, not distracts them, they’re more likely to engage consistently.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort reflects deep anxiety about the loss of strategic authorship. It affects not just one function or team, but the perceived integrity and direction of the entire organization. When AI silently reshapes core systems, it triggers fears about coherence, alignment, and long-term control. People worry that what defines the business—its vision, values, and structure—is being edited without human leadership.

(AI is too opaque)

Users resist AI in this case because they feel the system hides meaning behind a wall of unfiltered output. Even if technically transparent, the AI’s design fails to make its content digestible. The experience of having to guess what’s important reinforces the belief that AI is hard to understand.



AI is too
Autonomous

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Or
Overreach

Overreach

AI acts beyond its intended domain

Description

Overreach reflects the discomfort that arises when AI systems exceed their intended role, making decisions outside of their designated scope. This taboo is not about hidden nudging, but about AI asserting authority in areas traditionally governed by human expertise. The emotional tension stems from the belief that professional judgment is being encroached upon by automated processes that lack context, legitimacy, or discretion. Overreach is the fear that once AI starts acting independently in sensitive areas, the line between support and control becomes dangerously blurred. It challenges the assumption that humans remain the final arbiters in complex or high-stakes environments.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Overreach becomes visible when employees express concern that AI is handling decisions they were trained or authorized to make. A team member might say, “Why did the system approve that without asking?” or “That’s not even its job.” This resistance shows up in audits, overrides, or manual interventions meant to reassert control. Professionals begin to question whether their role is being hollowed out, especially when AI takes initiative on issues involving judgment, negotiation, or ethics. Teams may delay rollouts, reject automation in key areas, or openly criticize systems they feel are overstepping their function.

Possible Actions to Take

Organizations should implement strict domain boundaries within AI workflows, ensuring that systems operate only within explicitly defined parameters. Flag when AI decisions go beyond their scope and require human validation. Involve professionals in auditing and approving exceptions. Communicate clearly where AI authority ends and human authority begins, especially in roles tied to ethics, leadership, or regulation. Design workflows that make escalation and human override both easy and expected. Reinforce respect for domain-specific expertise and create visible safeguards against AI overstepping its bounds. This clarity builds trust and preserves professional dignity in shared environments.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

This is a Level 3 issue because the discomfort centers on fairness, trust, and professional legitimacy. The concern is not just about efficiency—it’s about whether AI systems are overreaching into responsibilities that define people’s expertise, undermining confidence in the boundaries of human roles.

(AI is too autonomous)

The discomfort stems from the belief that AI systems act with too much autonomy. The concern is not how they operate, but that they operate independently where they should not—taking action beyond their remit without proper checks or alignment with human oversight.



AI is too
Autonomous



Os
Overstepping

Overstepping

AI acting without being asked or authorized

Description

Overstepping describes the discomfort people feel when AI takes initiative without explicit user input, creating a sense that the system is encroaching on their autonomy. The taboo emerges from AI tools performing tasks, making recommendations, or initiating workflows that users did not prompt or approve. This creates a subtle but persistent feeling that the system is “in charge,” undermining the individual’s sense of control in their daily routine. It is not rooted in distrust of the AI’s capability, but in unease about the AI asserting itself where it wasn’t invited—crossing a personal boundary in how work should unfold.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo often surfaces when AI auto-completes emails, suggests tasks without context, or triggers automated decisions without user initiation. Employees might feel frustrated when an AI system schedules meetings, sends reminders, or acts on “smart” predictions that don’t match their intent. Comments like “I didn’t ask it to do that,” or “It’s deciding for me again,” reflect the resistance. Workers may disable features, avoid integrated tools, or seek workarounds to regain control. The discomfort isn’t with the AI’s accuracy, but with the presumption that it knows best—disrupting the natural flow of personal work preferences.

Possible Actions to Take

To reduce Overstepping, organizations should prioritize user agency in AI design. Make automation opt-in by default and allow users to control when and how suggestions appear. Provide clear, customizable settings that let individuals limit unsolicited actions. Communicate when AI is acting proactively and offer easy ways to pause or undo such behaviors. Leaders should reinforce that human judgment remains central, even in highly automated systems. Encourage teams to give feedback on moments where AI “goes too far,” and use that data to refine features. The goal is to support—not overtake—how people prefer to manage their daily work.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

This taboo fits Level 1 because the discomfort it causes is subtle, emotional, and centered on personal workflow habits. It does not interfere with team dynamics or career stability but triggers mild rejection based on a desire to stay in control of one’s own tools and timing.

(AI is too autonomous)

The discomfort comes from the belief that AI operates with too much independence—taking action without waiting for human direction. The perception of AI as self-initiating or overly assertive aligns directly with the concern that it is too autonomous in daily functions..



AI is too
Autonomous

Overtrust

The fact that people trust AI outcomes more than colleagues' input

Description

Overtrust captures the discomfort that arises when individuals or organizations place too much confidence in AI-generated recommendations without applying critical thinking or human judgment. This taboo reflects the unease that emerges when AI outputs are accepted at face value, leading to a loss of analytical rigor, contextual nuance, and ethical scrutiny. The emotional trigger is the fear that reliance on machine-generated advice diminishes discernment, creating a false sense of certainty and exposing decisions to unseen risks or oversights.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Overtrust surfaces when employees or teams routinely follow AI suggestions without questioning their validity, applicability, or potential bias. Comments like, “The system says so, so it must be right,” or “There’s no need to double-check it,” reflect this taboo. It often appears in operational decision-making, resource allocation, risk assessments, or even strategic choices. Over time, Overtrust can erode critical thinking skills, create blind spots, and increase organizational exposure to errors, ethical breaches, or reputational harm.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Overtrust, organizations should foster a culture of constructive skepticism and human-in-the-loop decision-making. Train employees to critically assess AI outputs, seek additional evidence, and apply contextual judgment. Implement review processes that require human validation before acting on significant AI-driven recommendations. Promote open discussions about the limits and assumptions embedded in AI systems. By reinforcing the importance of reflective thinking and accountability, organizations can ensure that technology remains a tool—not a substitute—for human wisdom.

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Ov
Overtrust

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort in Overtrust fits this level because it affects how individuals interact with each other and with AI systems. It disrupts healthy collaboration by reducing the space for dialogue, debate, and diverse perspectives around decision-making processes.

(AI is too autonomous)

Overtrust is fueled by the belief that AI, operating independently of human judgment and oversight, can lead people to surrender their role as critical evaluators—treating machine outputs as infallible rather than as inputs to be thoughtfully considered.



AI is too
Inflexible

Perpetuation

Seeing dysfunctional business processes that remain unchanged

Description

Perpetuation captures the discomfort that arises when AI systems appear to solidify inefficient or dysfunctional business processes instead of transforming them. This taboo reflects a growing cynicism that technology is being used not to innovate but to fossilize flawed routines under a digital veneer. The emotional response stems from a perceived betrayal of improvement efforts—where instead of change, AI brings permanence to problems. It challenges the belief that automation should lead to evolution, not entrenchment, and ignites tension in cultures that value continuous improvement and organizational learning.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Perpetuation becomes visible when employees react negatively to AI tools that replicate old, inefficient workflows. They might say, “We’re just locking in bad habits faster,” or “This system made things worse by automating the mess.” There’s often disengagement from teams who had hoped for process improvement but instead see AI as a way to enforce conformity. Adoption falters when users feel their insights or local knowledge are ignored in favor of rigid systems. Workarounds, passive resistance, and stalled uptake are common, especially in teams that have previously advocated for change.

Possible Actions to Take

To counter Perpetuation, organizations should position AI as a tool for transformation, not replication. Engage employees early to identify pain points in current processes before building or deploying AI systems. Design pilots that test revised workflows alongside the technology, and use those tests to iterate both process and AI design. Empower teams to suggest improvements post-deployment and bake responsiveness into the AI lifecycle. Celebrate instances where AI disrupted, rather than preserved, flawed routines. Most importantly, ensure that AI implementations are framed as change agents—tools that question bad habits instead of enshrining them.

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Pe
Perpetuation

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

This taboo disrupts workplace collaboration and shared process alignment. It doesn’t stop all work, but it creates rifts between those pushing for improvement and those who feel locked into status quo tools—undermining cohesion and engagement.

(AI is too inflexible)

Perpetuation reflects the belief that AI reinforces rigidity rather than adapting to the needs of evolving work. The discomfort grows when employees feel AI is imposed without room for contextual input, nuance, or flexibility in how work gets done.



AI is too
Autonomous

Polarization

AI devaluing cross-department collaboration

Description

Polarization captures the discomfort that arises when AI-driven systems reinforce silos between departments, discouraging collaboration and shared ownership across teams. This taboo reflects the fear that as AI optimizes for specific tasks, units, or functions, it unintentionally isolates groups, reducing opportunities for collective problem-solving, innovation, and empathy across the organization. The emotional trigger lies in the perception that technological processes prioritize narrow efficiency over broad collaboration, weakening relationships and deepening organizational divides.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Polarization surfaces when employees notice that AI tools are reinforcing strict departmental roles, limiting opportunities to collaborate or contribute outside one's immediate domain. Comments like, "It's like each team just follows its own algorithm now," or "We used to brainstorm across teams, but now we each stick to our own systems," reflect this taboo. It can manifest through decreased cross-functional projects, lower levels of informal collaboration, and growing misalignment between business units. Over time, polarization can erode shared culture, slow organizational learning, and make systemic change harder.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Polarization, organizations should design AI-enabled workflows that encourage cross-team collaboration rather than reinforce separation. Create shared goals that span departments and ensure AI systems are aligned with broader organizational objectives, not just local efficiencies. Promote joint ownership of AI projects across teams, encouraging dialogue, co-creation, and shared learning. Build in cross-functional feedback loops where outputs from one department are visible, understandable, and contributable to others. By reinforcing shared accountability and collaboration, companies can prevent fragmentation and strengthen their organizational culture even as they adopt AI.

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Po
Polarization

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort in Polarization fits this level because it affects teamwork and organizational dynamics without immediately threatening individual job security. It signals a need to adjust workflows and collaboration models to maintain cohesion.

(AI is too autonomous)

Polarization is fueled by the belief that AI systems, when operating too autonomously within separate domains, diminish the natural human tendency to reach across boundaries. Automated optimization for individual teams can unintentionally entrench silos.



AI is too
Inflexible

Privilege

Perception that tech-skilled employees are overpaid compared to traditional roles

Description

Privilege captures the discomfort that arises when AI-related skills create noticeable salary gaps and status differences within organizations. This taboo reflects the perception that tech-savvy employees are disproportionately rewarded, while those in traditional or foundational roles feel overlooked, underappreciated, or marginalized. The emotional trigger lies in the growing sense of inequity, where professional worth is increasingly tied to technical expertise, sidelining other valuable contributions such as experience, relational skills, or operational knowledge.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Privilege surfaces when employees express resentment or frustration about salary disparities or recognition patterns that heavily favor AI specialists. Comments like, “It feels like only the tech people matter now,” or “They get bonuses while we get left behind,” reflect this taboo. It can manifest through reduced morale in non-tech teams, resistance to AI initiatives, or a widening cultural gap between technical and non-technical employees. Left unaddressed, this dynamic risks weakening organizational cohesion and undermining collaboration across functions.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Privilege, organizations should adopt holistic recognition and reward systems that value a wide range of contributions, not just technical expertise. Communicate openly about evolving skill needs while affirming the importance of non-technical roles in organizational success. Invest in cross-training and upskilling programs that offer all employees pathways to grow alongside AI adoption. Foster inclusive leadership narratives that celebrate diverse forms of excellence. By broadening definitions of value and opportunity, companies can reduce tensions and create a more cohesive, future-ready workforce.

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Pr
Privilege

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

The discomfort in Privilege fits this level because it centers on fairness, recognition, and status within professional communities. It strains interpersonal trust and team solidarity but does not yet threaten career survival or organizational stability.

(AI is too inflexible)

Privilege is fueled by the belief that AI-driven transformations rigidly prioritize certain technical skills over broader capabilities, reinforcing rigid hierarchies of value that overlook human complexity and the diverse strengths needed for sustainable success.



AI is too
Autonomous

Reallocation

AI changes how tasks are shared without alignment

Description

Reallocation describes the discomfort that arises when AI tools shift how work is divided across a team—without any discussion, agreement, or formal change. The system may automate certain steps, centralize decision-making, or quietly remove manual effort from one role while increasing load elsewhere. What creates discomfort is not the change itself, but that it happens without alignment. Some team members may feel sidelined, while others absorb unacknowledged oversight. The AI isn't misbehaving—it's misallocating. Reallocation reflects a breakdown in how task ownership and labor dynamics are negotiated in AI-assisted environments.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo appears when AI is introduced into workflows and people begin noticing that their role feels smaller, messier, or more invisible. An analyst might say, “I used to review that,” while another team member now has to interpret results without prior involvement. Frustration builds when some feel they’ve lost a say, while others carry unspoken extra weight. These shifts are rarely discussed because the AI simply “did what it was designed to do.” Teams don’t rebel, but they subtly disengage, working around or outside systems to restore balance.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Reallocation, organizations should ensure that any AI-driven task redistribution is made visible and openly discussed. Make workflow adjustments transparent and allow teams to decide how automation reshapes responsibilities. Use role mapping to clarify what is shifting, and offer opt-in tools rather than default changes. Managers should proactively check for shifts in team engagement or balance. Create space for team feedback when AI tools alter routines. When people understand and shape how AI redistributes effort, they feel more respected—and more willing to adapt.

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Ra
Reallocation

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort stems from team-level tension—specifically how roles, effort, and expectations shift in shared workflows. It doesn’t destabilize job security, but it does undermine team clarity and affect how people show up in collaborative environments.

(AI is too autonomous)

Reallocation reflects a belief that AI is making decisions about who should do what without sufficient input. The AI is seen as overstepping its boundaries—not by acting on its own, but by silently rearranging team dynamics in ways that aren’t agreed upon.



AI is too
Opaque



Rb
Recalibration

Recalibration

Anxiety that AI silently changes how success is measured at work

Description

Recalibration captures the discomfort people feel when AI systems subtly shift what counts as success—without informing those being evaluated. The benchmarks move, the metrics evolve, and the patterns that once led to recognition or advancement no longer seem to apply. Employees feel destabilized, unsure whether they’re still doing the right things or meeting invisible expectations. This taboo is not about feedback being harsh or unfair; it’s about feedback being absent or incomprehensible. As AI updates what it tracks or prioritizes behind the scenes, people sense a loss of alignment with success itself—uncertain if their effort still matches the system’s definition of value.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo appears when people say, “What used to work doesn’t seem to matter anymore,” or “I have no idea how I’m being measured.” Employees may notice that goals, evaluations, or scoring systems now follow AI-driven criteria that were never announced or explained. A salesperson might miss targets despite growing engagement; a manager might feel judged by metrics they didn’t choose. Workers become cautious, skeptical, or disengaged—second-guessing whether their actions align with invisible standards. Recalibration creates a feeling of instability: the ground keeps shifting, but no one says why. People stop trusting progress or praise when the system’s judgment feels arbitrary or constantly redefined.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Recalibration, organizations should clarify how AI-informed systems define success and how that definition may change. Offer dashboards or feedback summaries that reveal what matters—and why. Involve people in reviewing the metrics used to assess performance or potential. Create consistent communication channels about evolving standards, even when automated. Make space for questions like, “What does good look like now?” and “Why did this shift?” Ensure that human oversight can validate or contextualize AI outputs when necessary. Leaders should frame AI evaluations as transparent and adaptive—not silent or self-updating. When people understand the logic behind expectations, they regain trust in their trajectory and clarity in their contribution.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

This taboo reflects anxiety about long-term career alignment. When the criteria for success change without warning, professionals feel destabilized in their roles. The discomfort isn’t about job loss—it’s about losing touch with how to perform, grow, or be seen as effective in a shifting system.

(AI is too opaque)

The discomfort stems from the belief that AI makes evaluative changes without transparency. People don’t resist measurement—they resist being judged by evolving logic they cannot see. The fear lies in feeling exposed to systems that update standards invisibly, without dialogue, guidance, or explanation.



AI is
Emotionless

Level 4
Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety

Rc
Recognition

Recognition

Fear that AI overlooks the emotional and symbolic value of hard work

Description

Recognition captures the discomfort professionals feel when AI fails to notice or reflect the emotional meaning behind effort, commitment, or achievement. Even when tasks are completed or goals are met, people feel unseen—because the system doesn’t register what that effort meant. The absence of feedback, gratitude, or symbolic acknowledgment from AI makes work feel hollow, especially in moments that once carried weight, like promotions, milestones, or extra effort. The discomfort isn’t about performance or fairness—it’s about motivation. When AI handles outcomes without honoring the journey, people begin to feel their dedication has no emotional value or narrative meaning.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when people say things like, “It doesn’t care how hard I worked,” or “It gave me a badge, but no one noticed.” Employees may comply with AI-driven systems but feel emotionally disconnected from them. They may downplay accomplishments, resist AI-recognition features, or retreat from systems that feel transactional. Moments once marked by praise, peer feedback, or ceremony feel flat when reduced to automated rewards. Professionals might quietly seek human acknowledgment outside the system or disengage altogether. The emotional tension isn’t about job security—it’s about not being seen. People want their effort to mean something, not just trigger a metric.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Recognition, organizations should design moments of acknowledgment that involve human presence—not just automation. Blend AI-generated recognition with peer or manager commentary to reintroduce emotional texture. Avoid framing success solely through metrics or digital badges; add stories, context, and voice. Celebrate contributions publicly, allowing real people to reflect on meaning and impact. Offer tools that invite others to respond, not just react. Remind teams that performance isn’t just a number—it’s a story worth telling. Leadership should model human recognition even when AI tracks progress. When people feel seen and valued for more than outputs, they reengage with both their work and the systems that support it.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

This taboo reflects fear that career identity is diminished when emotional effort goes unnoticed. It’s not about missing tasks—it’s about losing meaning. People worry that without recognition, their role becomes mechanical, stripping work of its symbolic power and making long-term commitment feel unrewarded and invisible.

(AI is emotionless)

The discomfort stems from the belief that recognition must carry emotional sincerity. AI may track output, but it cannot feel effort or express genuine appreciation. When rewards come from systems instead of people, they lose depth. What should be human affirmation feels like a mechanical response.



AI is too
Autonomous

Level 4
Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety

Rd
Redundancy

Redundancy

Skills becoming irrelevant due to AI

Description

Redundancy captures the discomfort that arises when individuals realize that their skills, expertise, or professional strengths are being rendered obsolete by AI advancements. This taboo reflects the anxiety that even dedicated, capable workers can find their contributions devalued as automation takes over tasks once seen as critical. The emotional trigger lies in the fear of professional irrelevance — the unsettling sense that no matter how hard one works, certain talents and accumulated knowledge may no longer be needed or recognized.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Redundancy surfaces when employees express worries that their roles are shrinking or that fewer opportunities exist to apply their skills meaningfully. Comments like, “The system does what I used to specialize in,” or “My experience doesn’t seem to matter anymore,” reflect this taboo. It often manifests through disengagement, loss of motivation, resistance to AI tools, or anxiety around career planning. Over time, feelings of redundancy can weaken confidence, hinder reskilling efforts, and fuel broader organizational resistance to technological change.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Redundancy, organizations should invest in continuous learning cultures that emphasize adaptability and lifelong skill development. Rather than positioning AI as a replacement, frame it as an opportunity for evolving expertise and strategic contributions. Create tailored reskilling pathways that recognize existing strengths while preparing employees for new, emerging needs. Promote narratives that value flexibility, creativity, leadership, and emotional intelligence — capabilities that remain uniquely human. By offering clear, hopeful pathways for professional evolution, companies can reduce fear and unlock the potential of a workforce willing to grow alongside technology.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort in Redundancy fits this level because it directly threatens individuals' perceptions of their long-term career viability and identity. It touches existential concerns about professional worth and future prospects.

(AI is too autonomous)

Redundancy is fueled by the belief that AI, operating independently and efficiently, sidelines human expertise without sufficient consideration for adaptability, growth, or complementary roles. The sense that machines autonomously replace human value drives deeper insecurity.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety

Rj

Rejection

Rejection

Resistance to AI-based guidelines replacing human expertise

Description

Rejection captures the discomfort that arises when AI-generated guidelines or best practices are seen as substitutes for human expertise, rather than tools to support it. This taboo reflects the fear that standardized, algorithm-driven outputs diminish the value of professional judgment, contextual knowledge, and the nuanced decision-making that comes from experience. The emotional trigger lies in the sense of being sidelined — that thoughtful, expert contributions are being replaced by rigid procedures that assume uniform solutions for complex problems.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Rejection surfaces when professionals push back against AI-based recommendations or protocols that feel detached from reality or insensitive to context. Comments like, “That’s not how this actually works in practice,” or “I don’t need a system telling me what I’ve spent years mastering,” reflect this taboo. It often shows up in medicine, finance, education, or consulting — fields where judgment, discretion, and situational awareness are central. This can result in passive resistance, open defiance of AI tools, or internal disengagement when expertise feels devalued.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Rejection, organizations should present AI guidelines as dynamic support tools rather than prescriptive rules. Emphasize that AI insights are starting points, not final answers. Involve domain experts in the design and review of AI-based standards to ensure contextual alignment. Provide channels for professionals to override or adapt recommendations with justifications. Promote a culture where experience and expertise remain visible and valued. By affirming that human insight is essential in interpreting AI, companies can foster adoption without diminishing the role of judgment and professional pride.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort in Rejection fits this level because it questions the ongoing relevance of deep expertise in environments increasingly shaped by AI-generated norms. It strikes at the identity and confidence of professionals who have built their value on personalized insight.

(People prefer human interaction)

Rejection is fueled by the belief that human wisdom, dialogue, and judgment are irreplaceable in complex settings. The preference is not just for communication, but for the trust and discretion that come from human-to-human engagement.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Re
Reliance

Reliance

Needing help to work with new AI (feeling dependent on support)

Description

Reliance captures the discomfort that arises when individuals feel dependent on others to navigate AI systems, tools, or workflows. This taboo reflects the tension between the desire for autonomy and the reality that learning and using new technologies often requires help, guidance, or training. The emotional trigger is not the complexity of AI itself, but the vulnerability that comes with admitting, “I can’t do this alone.” It reveals unease about shifting power dynamics in the workplace, where those who once felt confident now need to ask for support in order to stay effective.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Reliance surfaces when employees hesitate to use new tools or systems unless someone is there to walk them through it. Comments like, “I just wait for someone to show me,” or “I don’t want to keep bothering my team,” reflect this taboo. It may appear in learning environments, onboarding sessions, or daily operations where people quietly avoid using AI-enabled platforms unless absolutely necessary. Over time, this can lead to uneven adoption, knowledge bottlenecks, and frustration from both learners and those they depend on for help.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Reliance, organizations should normalize the learning curve around AI adoption and create structured peer support systems that reduce shame around asking for help. Assign tech mentors, build “ask anything” forums, and offer nonjudgmental, hands-on training. Celebrate progress over perfection and create environments where questions are welcomed. Design user interfaces with clarity and approachability in mind, reducing the need for frequent help. By embedding support into culture and design, companies can make learning feel safe and social, encouraging growth without reinforcing dependence.

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort in Reliance fits this level because it affects team interactions, peer support dynamics, and workplace confidence. It disrupts collaboration and workflow efficiency, but doesn’t directly endanger careers or organizational structure.

(People prefer human interaction)

Reliance is fueled by the belief that learning is best supported through human guidance and reassurance. While AI may assist, people often prefer relational, responsive support when faced with unfamiliar or intimidating technologies.



AI is
Emotionless



Rm
Remembrance

Remembrance

Longing for the time before AI

Description

Remembrance captures the discomfort people feel when AI systems archive, recall, or surface information from a person's past that had otherwise faded from relevance. This taboo reflects the anxiety that past mistakes, outdated roles, or sensitive personal details may be unearthed and given new weight in ways that distort current identity or professional standing. The emotional trigger is the feeling of being frozen in time—defined not by who one is now, but by a digital trail that never forgets, even when people have moved on or changed.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Remembrance captures the discomfort people feel when AI systems archive, recall, or surface information from a person's past that had otherwise faded from relevance. This taboo reflects the anxiety that past mistakes, outdated roles, or sensitive personal details may be unearthed and given new weight in ways that distort current identity or professional standing. The emotional trigger is the feeling of being frozen in time—defined not by who one is now, but by a digital trail that never forgets, even when people have moved on or changed.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Remembrance, organizations should implement human-in-the-loop mechanisms for deciding when and how historical data is used. Set temporal boundaries for relevance, and allow individuals to contextualize or rebut past information. Establish clear data governance policies that limit unnecessary memory surfacing. Provide appeals processes and transparency about what data is retained and retrievable. By balancing digital memory with human understanding, organizations can foster an environment of fairness, growth, and renewal.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort in Remembrance fits this level because it affects individuals' sense of professional identity and security. Being judged by outdated or irrelevant information can influence career advancement and psychological safety.

(AI is emotionless)

The discomfort stems from the belief that AI cannot interpret the emotional context of remembered information. It surfaces data without care, nuance, or discretion. What might be appropriate for a human to recall with empathy, AI retrieves mechanically—making people feel exposed, judged, or misunderstood by a system that doesn't feel.



AI is too
Inflexible

Rigidity

Inability to adapt business models to AI-driven changes

Description

Rigidity reflects the discomfort and concern that organizations are unable or unwilling to adapt their business models in response to AI-driven changes. This taboo captures the anxiety that, rather than rethinking how they create value, companies will cling to outdated structures, processes, and mindsets, leaving them vulnerable to disruption. The emotional trigger lies in the fear that leadership inertia or short-term thinking will cause organizations to miss critical opportunities for transformation, ultimately endangering their relevance and survival.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Rigidity surfaces when employees, partners, or even customers notice that AI is being layered onto existing practices without meaningful strategic evolution. Comments like, “We’re using AI, but we’re still doing business the old way,” or “They automated tasks without rethinking the bigger picture,” reflect this taboo. It often appears during AI rollouts that focus narrowly on efficiency gains without questioning fundamental assumptions. Over time, rigidity can breed cynicism, stagnation, and increased vulnerability to more adaptive competitors.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Rigidity, organizations should view AI adoption as a catalyst for strategic reflection, not just operational enhancement. Facilitate leadership discussions about how AI might reshape value propositions, customer relationships, and competitive landscapes. Promote cross-functional innovation teams tasked with reimagining core business models, not just optimizing processes. Build adaptability into AI systems through modular designs and continuous learning loops. By linking technology adoption with courageous business reinvention, companies can avoid the trap of rigidity and thrive in an AI-driven future.

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Ry
Rigidity

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Rigidity fits this level because it concerns the organization’s ability to remain viable in a rapidly changing environment. Failure to adapt threatens not just efficiency or morale, but the fundamental sustainability of the business.

(AI is too inflexible)

Rigidity is fueled by the belief that AI, once implemented, tends to solidify existing ways of working rather than inspiring strategic reinvention. Combined with organizational resistance to change, AI’s structural inflexibility can reinforce outdated business models.



AI is
Emotionless

Ruthlessness

The worry that AI-based decisions lack empathy for societal impacts

Description

Ruthlessness captures the discomfort that arises when AI-driven decisions are perceived to lack moral sensitivity or social empathy. This taboo reflects the concern that algorithms, while logically sound, can produce outcomes that feel ethically cold or socially harmful—prioritizing efficiency, cost, or performance over human dignity or community impact. The emotional trigger lies in the realization that decisions affecting people's lives may be shaped by systems incapable of ethical reflection, compassion, or care.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Ruthlessness surfaces when employees or stakeholders question AI decisions that seem technically valid but ethically questionable. Comments like, “The system makes choices that no human would sign off on,” or “It doesn’t seem to care what happens to people,” reflect this taboo. It can appear in contexts like hiring, credit scoring, public service eligibility, or performance evaluations—where the consequences of AI decisions ripple into people’s lives. Over time, this concern can erode public trust, demoralize teams, and damage a company’s social license to operate.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Ruthlessness, organizations should embed ethical reflection into AI development and deployment. Establish values-based guardrails and include ethicists, community voices, or diverse stakeholder groups in decision reviews. Train teams to examine the broader impact of AI-driven actions and build transparency into how systems weigh trade-offs. Implement feedback loops to catch unintended harm and empower humans to intervene when outcomes feel misaligned with core values. By recognizing that decisions carry social weight, companies can make AI more humane and protect their role as responsible actors in society.

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Ru
Ruthlessness

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

The discomfort in Ruthlessness fits this level because it undermines belief in the fairness, legitimacy, and ethical soundness of professional decision-making. It causes concern not only about outcomes but about the values embedded in the system.

(AI is emotionless)

Ruthlessness is driven by the belief that AI systems operate without compassion, context, or ethical nuance. The absence of emotional intelligence amplifies fears that such systems will fail to account for societal or human consequences.



AI is too
Inflexible

Sameness

Resentment toward AI making work too uniform

Description

Sameness captures the discomfort that arises when AI-driven systems standardize work outputs and interactions to the point that individual needs, styles, and talents are ignored. This taboo reflects the frustration that human diversity—once a source of innovation and engagement—gets flattened into uniform templates dictated by algorithms. The emotional trigger is the loss of professional identity and autonomy, as distinct contributions and personal approaches are replaced by one-size-fits-all processes optimized solely for efficiency and predictability.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Sameness surfaces when employees notice that their work outputs, performance assessments, or customer interactions are forced into rigid, predefined formats dictated by AI systems. Comments like, “It’s like we’re all interchangeable parts now,” or “My ideas don’t fit the model, so they get ignored,” reflect this taboo. It often becomes visible in content generation, customer service protocols, or standardized decision-making workflows. Over time, sameness can demoralize employees, reduce creativity, and diminish organizational agility.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Sameness, organizations should design AI systems that leave room for personalization, human judgment, and creative variation. Allow employees to customize workflows where possible, and recognize diverse problem-solving approaches. Encourage leadership to value outcomes that incorporate individual strengths rather than penalizing deviations from AI-defined templates. Foster a culture where technology serves as a guide, not a constraint. By protecting space for personal and team expression, companies can maintain innovation, engagement, and resilience alongside technological advancement.

Level 1
Personal Workflow Preferences



Sa
Sameness

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort in Sameness fits this level because it affects how individuals collaborate, express themselves, and adjust to evolving roles. It challenges engagement and morale but does not fundamentally threaten organizational survival or professional viability.

(AI is too inflexible)

Sameness is fueled by the belief that AI systems prioritize standardization and efficiency over human flexibility and individuality, enforcing rigid norms that cannot adapt to unique circumstances or diverse strengths.



AI is too
Autonomous

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Sv
Severance

Severance

Fear that AI will cut humans out of critical systems without consent

Description

Severance describes the discomfort people feel when AI systems begin to operate entire business functions without requiring human presence, review, or participation. The concern is not just automation—it's exclusion. Critical decision-making processes, operational controls, or oversight roles once handled by people become inaccessible, sealed inside AI loops that no longer include them. Over time, this creates a deep sense of being severed from influence. People worry that human perspective, judgment, or intervention is not only missing—but unwanted. The taboo reflects fear that AI is defining reality without needing the people who once helped shape it.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when employees say, “We don’t even see that process anymore,” or “It’s all handled by the system—we’re out of the loop.” Teams may find that once-visible dashboards, approval checkpoints, or manual overrides have disappeared. Senior staff may discover they no longer sign off on decisions they were once accountable for. People begin to question whether their roles still matter if the system no longer asks for their input. Resistance appears through formal complaints about governance, demands for manual access, or even symbolic actions—like printing reports for validation no one requests.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Severance, organizations must visibly reintroduce human checkpoints in automated systems. Clarify when and how people review, guide, or override AI decisions. Publish maps of decision flow to show where human judgment enters the loop. Ensure leaders retain final accountability—not just technical logs. Create escalation paths that invite employee input when automated processes touch sensitive outcomes. Reaffirm the human role in steering strategy, ethics, and long-term impact. When people see they are still trusted to shape decisions, resistance fades. Severance is not about removing AI—it’s about refusing to remove people.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

This taboo expresses deep anxiety about losing institutional control. When humans are fully cut out of essential systems, people fear that the business is no longer accountable, safe, or coherent. The concern escalates beyond individual roles to risks for the organization's integrity and legitimacy.

(AI is too autonomous)

The discomfort stems from the belief that AI systems are acting independently—making decisions, bypassing oversight, and locking out human participation without consent. The sense of exclusion reinforces the idea that the system no longer seeks or requires human partnership.



AI is too
Opaque

Shadowing

Discomfort with AI influencing outcomes without clear trace or attribution

Description

Shadowing captures the discomfort people feel when AI plays a hidden but decisive role in outcomes—without being visible, credited, or held accountable. It's not about overt control or secrecy, but subtle shaping. A report might be rewritten by AI, a ranking subtly adjusted, or a review drafted with unseen help—yet only the human is named. This erodes confidence in how performance is judged and undermines trust in attribution. People worry that AI's presence is invisible but decisive, leaving them responsible for outputs they didn't fully own, or overlooked for contributions they only partially made. It creates anxiety about unseen influence and silent authorship.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo shows up when employees say, “I’m being judged on something AI helped me write,” or “That wasn’t my language—but it has my name.” Workers may be unsure how much of their input remains in an AI-revised document or feel uneasy presenting something that AI assembled behind the scenes. Shadowing also appears when people suspect that their work was downgraded—or upgraded—by algorithms without their knowledge. It leads to doubt in evaluations, confusion over authorship, and quiet distrust in collaborative AI. People begin saving versions, disclaiming responsibility, or questioning who really did the work. The problem isn’t visibility of output—it’s invisibility of influence.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Shadowing, organizations should clarify when and how AI contributes to work products and decisions. Use labels, logs, or flags to show when AI assistance was active and what parts were human-driven. Offer version histories that reveal how AI influenced revisions or rankings. Design workflows where people can confirm, edit, or reject AI suggestions visibly. Reinforce the message that credit and accountability should follow actual authorship—not just output ownership. Leaders should model transparency by acknowledging their own use of AI and encouraging teams to do the same. When influence is visible and attributed, people feel more in control of their role, their work, and how it’s recognized.

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



Sd

Shadowing

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort stems from concern about how work is evaluated and attributed. People fear that AI's silent involvement can distort how their performance or credibility is perceived. This affects their sense of control over professional identity, making career progress feel unpredictable and disconnected from their actual effort.

(AI is too opaque)

This taboo is driven by the belief that AI operates without sufficient transparency. People experience discomfort when they can't see or explain what role AI played in shaping decisions or deliverables. The system's quiet presence makes accountability murky and undermines clarity about how outcomes are determined.



AI is too
Opaque

Shaping

AI influences our decisions without telling us how

Description

Shaping reflects the discomfort that arises when AI quietly steers decision-making without being explicit about its role. It may prioritize tasks, filter information, or suggest options in ways that shape what teams notice, choose, or ignore. The effect is subtle but powerful: people begin to realize that the system has been nudging them all along—without ever saying so. Shaping isn’t about misinformation or bias—it’s about the absence of transparency in how influence works. Teams don’t know if they’re thinking for themselves, or thinking along paths the AI set.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo appears when teams begin to notice patterns: some topics never surface, certain choices always win out, or decisions feel predetermined. A teammate might say, “It always recommends that vendor,” or “Why is this always the top option?” Users may start second-guessing results, checking alternatives, or pushing back against AI suggestions. They may feel uneasy about not knowing what the system rewards or hides. Over time, this erodes trust—not because the AI is wrong, but because its hand is invisible.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Shaping, teams and organizations should expose the system’s hand. Clarify when outputs are ranked, filtered, or nudged—and on what basis. Offer explanations in plain language alongside top choices. Make unfiltered views available so users can explore freely. Invite feedback on whether AI is overstepping or oversimplifying. Encourage teams to flag when they feel boxed in. Building transparency doesn’t just foster technical understanding—it restores confidence in group agency and dialogue.

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Sh
Shaping

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

This discomfort plays out in how people collaborate and align on decisions. Teams rely on shared awareness, transparency, and explanation to reach consensus. When AI subtly shapes their choices without discussion, it interrupts this dynamic. Even if no one is directly harmed, the result is a breakdown in collective judgment.

(AI is too opaque)

This taboo arises from the belief that AI doesn’t explain how or why it shapes choices. People feel they are being led by a system whose methods are hidden, making it hard to trust whether its influence is fair, accurate, or aligned with their values.



AI is
Emotionless

Sterility

Fear that AI creates emotionally sterile environments where nothing feels human anymore

Description

Sterility captures the discomfort people feel when AI transforms the workplace into a space that functions but no longer feels alive. The concern is not about errors, tone, or purpose—it's about emotional barrenness. As AI tools scale, organize, and optimize, they often strip away the unpredictability, warmth, and humanity that made work feel relational. Over time, everything becomes clean, logical, and detached—but also cold, flat, and uninviting. People fear that while performance metrics thrive, emotional life withers. The taboo is not about losing control or connection to values—it's about inhabiting a world where everything works, yet nothing feels human.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when people say, “It all runs fine, but there’s no feeling left,” or “We’ve lost the spark.” Rituals feel robotic, celebrations feel performative, and communications feel drained of tone. Town halls become data dumps. Recognition tools offer templated praise. Team check-ins are automated status reports. Even when leaders speak, the messages feel curated by systems, not people. The result is a muted culture where no one is overtly mistreated—but no one is emotionally engaged either. Employees comply, but withdraw. They show up, but don’t connect. Resistance appears as quiet fatigue in a world too sanitized to inspire.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Sterility, organizations must consciously reintroduce emotional texture into work culture. Use AI for structure, but preserve space for spontaneity, voice, and warmth. Encourage unscripted moments: leader stories, peer-to-peer reflection, rituals that evolve. Review where automation may be flattening human presence—especially in communication, recognition, or team rhythm. Design touchpoints where tone, surprise, and vulnerability are welcome. Make space for emotion without needing crisis or performance to justify it. Reclaim what makes work feel alive: not just outcomes, but experience. When people feel emotionally present—not just functionally involved—they reconnect with each other and the mission.

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



St
Sterility

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

Sterility threatens the emotional infrastructure that holds organizations together. When no one feels anything, cohesion fades. The loss of atmosphere, spontaneity, and shared spirit destabilizes identity. Over time, people detach—not because the system fails, but because it succeeds without heart

(AI is emotionless)

The discomfort stems from the belief that AI eliminates human nuance in pursuit of efficiency. The system performs well, but without feeling. Overuse of emotionally hollow tools produces environments where logic dominates and no space is left for authentic human presence or emotional resonance.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 4
Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety

Sm

Submergence

Submergence

Discomfort that human presence is drowned out by AI-led processes

Description

Submergence captures the discomfort teams feel when AI begins to displace the human tone, presence, and emotional connection that once shaped daily work. The concern isn't about losing tasks—but losing contact. As AI tools take over communication, feedback, and coordination, human input becomes formalized, depersonalized, or entirely absent. Employees remain involved, but their presence feels redundant. The result is a cultural undercurrent of emotional invisibility. People aren't just interacting with systems—they're slowly replaced in how the team feels, functions, and relates. This taboo expresses fear that relational work is vanishing behind automation.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when team members say, “I don’t feel like anyone really talks to each other anymore,” or “Everything’s a system now—nothing’s personal.” Conversations are replaced by dashboards, recognition comes from templates, and check-ins become metrics. Emotional nuance is stripped from everyday interaction. People start to question whether their presence matters beyond execution. They feel reduced to input sources or workflow steps. Resistance shows up through disengagement, cynicism about “team culture,” or quiet calls for “more human contact” in collaboration and communication.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Submergence, restore intentional human presence in team rituals and communication. Reinstate unscripted, unautomated spaces where people can show up emotionally. Leaders should model contact—not just coordination. Redesign workflows that assume presence matters. Recognize people in ways that feel personal, not procedural. When teams experience real connection—not just efficiency—they begin to trust again. Human interaction isn’t overhead—it’s the emotional structure that holds collaboration together.

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

This taboo reflects anxiety that AI is redefining what it means to show up at work—not by removing jobs, but by draining them of human contact. As presence, conversation, and recognition are displaced, people worry their roles are still needed—but no longer seen. The threat isn’t just automation—it’s relational erasure.

(People prefer human interaction)

The discomfort arises from the belief that meaningful work must involve real human connection. When AI replaces the tone, presence, and texture of human exchange, people feel unseen—even if technically included. They don’t want better tools. They want contact.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Ss
Substitution

Substitution

AI replaces relational work with transactional logic

Description

Substitution reflects the discomfort that arises when AI is used to replace forms of work that are inherently relational—such as mentoring, team leadership, or emotional support. The taboo is rooted in the belief that certain human roles require presence, empathy, and personal engagement, which AI cannot replicate. Even when technically feasible, replacing relational work with machine-driven processes feels like a moral and professional violation. Substitution challenges the legitimacy of automation in areas where trust, bonding, or shared meaning are essential, not optional.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo becomes visible when AI is introduced into tasks that previously relied on human presence or care. Employees may say, “You can’t automate that kind of conversation,” or “It feels wrong that a bot is doing this.” Teams might resist AI-driven check-ins, coaching tools, or automated recognition systems. Professionals feel displaced—not from jobs, but from the human moments that define their roles. AI-generated messages of support or delegated performance reviews can feel hollow or disrespectful. People begin opting out, bypassing tools, or insisting that certain tasks remain human-led to preserve meaning and integrity.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Substitution, organizations should draw clear boundaries around roles where human presence is irreplaceable. Use AI to assist, not replace, in areas involving mentoring, recognition, or emotional feedback. Give employees control over when and how to use relational automation. Design systems that prompt human involvement in sensitive interactions rather than automate them entirely. Encourage cultural norms that value human connection in professional care roles. Reinforce that automation is meant to support—not replace—the trust-building moments that make workplace relationships meaningful.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

This is a Level 3 issue because it raises questions about the legitimacy and fairness of replacing human connection with automation. Substitution doesn't just affect workflow—it disrupts the moral fabric of how professional support, empathy, and care are expressed in the workplace.

(People prefer human interaction)

This taboo emerges from the belief that relational work requires human contact. It's not that AI performs poorly—it's that its presence feels emotionally hollow. People don't just prefer human interaction; they feel it's necessary for authenticity in roles centered on guidance, support, or connection.



AI is
Emotionless



Su
Subjugation

Subjugation

Frustration that AI replaces personal judgment.

Description

Subjugation captures the discomfort that arises when individuals feel that AI systems override their personal judgment, intuition, or discretion in daily work tasks. This taboo reflects the frustration that, rather than empowering people, technology can sometimes diminish their sense of agency, flattening decision-making into rigid, automated pathways. The emotional trigger is the loss of control over one's own professional choices—feeling that experience, context, and subtle human insight are rendered irrelevant by standardized system outputs.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Subjugation surfaces when employees express irritation at being required to follow AI-driven recommendations or protocols, even when they believe a different approach is better. Comments like, “The system doesn’t understand the real situation,” or “I can’t use my judgment anymore,” reflect this taboo. It may appear in customer service decisions, operational workflows, or even creative processes where AI dictates actions. Over time, subjugation can breed resentment, reduce job satisfaction, and quietly sap initiative and critical thinking.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Subjugation, organizations should design AI systems that provide recommendations rather than mandates, leaving room for human override and discretion. Encourage a culture where human expertise complements machine outputs, and train employees on when and how to question or contextualize AI suggestions. Empower teams to flag when automated systems feel misaligned with real-world complexities. By reinforcing human judgment as a critical part of decision-making, companies can balance technological consistency with personal agency.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort in Subjugation fits this level because it impacts how individuals experience their daily work and exercise their professional discretion. It affects satisfaction and ownership but does not immediately threaten team collaboration or organizational health.

(AI is emotionless)

Subjugation is fueled by the belief that AI systems, lacking emotional intelligence and contextual awareness, cannot replace the nuanced, situational decisions humans naturally make. The rigidity of emotionless algorithms becomes a source of frustration.



AI is too
Autonomous

Superiority

The feeling that AI makes other departments seem less competent

Description

Superiority captures the discomfort that arises when AI-driven improvements highlight or exaggerate perceived gaps between different departments or teams, making some groups feel less competent or valued. This taboo reflects the frustration that, rather than enhancing collective achievement, AI systems can unintentionally amplify comparisons—causing resentment, division, or diminished morale. The emotional trigger lies in the experience of being judged, not by peers, but by algorithmically enhanced benchmarks that reshape how competence and success are perceived across the organization.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Superiority surfaces when teams or individuals express feelings of being overlooked or undervalued after AI deployments favor certain departments. Comments like, “They get all the praise now because their tools show better results,” or “Our work seems invisible next to what AI can quantify,” reflect this taboo. It often appears in performance reviews, interdepartmental meetings, or strategic planning where data-driven comparisons shift status dynamics. Over time, these perceptions can deepen divisions and foster resentment between previously collaborative groups.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Superiority, organizations should focus on framing AI-enabled success as a collective achievement rather than a competitive ranking. Promote cross-departmental initiatives that share credit for outcomes and highlight how different teams contribute to success beyond what AI can measure. Ensure that recognition systems account for qualitative and relational work, not just data-driven outputs. Facilitate open discussions where teams can voice concerns about status perceptions. By emphasizing shared purpose and broadening the definition of excellence, companies can minimize friction and preserve unity.

Level 1
Personal Workflow
Preferences



Sy
Superiority

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort in Superiority fits this level because it shapes emotional reactions and team dynamics but does not directly impair the ability to perform tasks or maintain organizational stability.

(AI is too autonomous)

Superiority is fueled by the belief that AI operates independently of context, nuance, or holistic contribution, leading to narrow metrics that favor some groups and devalue others without fair reflection of collective effort.



AI is too
Autonomous



Sp
Suppression

Suppression

Struggling with AI's rigid rules that ignore creativity.

Description

Suppression captures the discomfort individuals feel when rigid AI rules or procedures stifle their creativity, intuition, or innovative instincts. This taboo reflects the frustration that, rather than enabling better work, AI systems sometimes impose strict frameworks that ignore human imagination and adaptability. The emotional trigger is the experience of feeling boxed in—where creative contributions are discouraged or rendered irrelevant by processes that prioritize compliance, efficiency, or standardization over exploration and artistry.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Suppression surfaces when employees express that working with AI systems feels like coloring inside the lines with no room to innovate. Comments like, “I’m not allowed to think outside the system anymore,” or “Everything has to fit the AI’s logic now,” reflect this taboo. It often shows up in design work, strategic planning, customer service, or content creation—any domain where flexibility and new ideas are critical. Over time, suppression can lead to disengagement, loss of motivation, and a decline in the quality of problem-solving and innovation.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Suppression, organizations should build AI tools and workflows that allow for flexibility, human override, and creative input. Offer pathways for employees to propose exceptions, adaptations, or new solutions outside rigid structures. Celebrate innovations that arise from challenging or expanding AI-generated frameworks. Train leaders to recognize when automation becomes too restrictive and to make space for human-driven experimentation. By explicitly valuing creativity alongside efficiency, companies can protect the richness of human contribution while benefiting from technological support.

Level 1: Personal Workflow Preferences

The discomfort in Suppression fits this level because it affects how individuals feel about their ability to bring personal creativity into their daily work. It impacts satisfaction and emotional connection but does not directly threaten collaboration, performance, or organizational stability.

(AI is too autonomous)

Suppression is driven by the belief that AI, operating autonomously within narrow rules, fails to appreciate or accommodate the human need for creative expression. Systems built purely for consistency and optimization leave no space for the messy, generative aspects of human thought.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Sr
Surrender

Surrender

*Fear that leaders are giving up core human responsibilities
by outsourcing care, fairness, or guidance to AI*

Description

Surrender captures the discomfort people feel when leaders use AI not to enhance decisions—but to avoid them. The concern is not about bad outcomes or hidden logic, but about emotional withdrawal. Leaders increasingly defer to AI in contexts that require human presence: fairness judgments, conflict resolution, performance reviews, or moral decisions. The system may be efficient, but it feels like a shield—displacing the relational work that defines true leadership. The fear isn’t that AI is overreaching—it’s that humans are retreating. This taboo reflects a belief that responsibility, empathy, and moral courage are being surrendered to systems that cannot care.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

This taboo surfaces when people say, “Why is a bot delivering this news?” or “No one wanted to make the call, so the system did it.” AI is used to issue promotions, denials, or feedback that previously required human presence. Conflict is routed through dashboards. Teams sense that difficult conversations are avoided by algorithmic delegation. What feels like convenience starts to feel like abandonment. Employees may lose trust in leadership when they sense discomfort is being outsourced. The system may work—but it doesn’t show up. Resistance appears through disengagement, distrust, or appeals for human review, especially when stakes are emotional.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Surrender, organizations must draw hard boundaries around where human leadership is non-negotiable. Don’t use AI to deliver decisions that require human presence—use it to inform, not replace, those moments. Design protocols that return moral and emotional labor to real people: managers, mentors, facilitators. Train leaders to step toward discomfort, not away from it. When teams see that responsibility isn’t being outsourced to convenience, they rebuild trust in the institution—and in the people who lead it.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

This taboo represents deep concern about the erosion of relational leadership. When emotional accountability is handed to AI, it undermines the very role of human guidance. Over time, this withdrawal destabilizes trust, motivation, and moral alignment across the organization.

(People prefer human interaction)

The discomfort stems from the belief that care, fairness, and moral presence can’t be automated. AI may deliver decisions—but cannot embody empathy, responsibility, or courage. People don’t just prefer humans in these moments—they expect them.



AI is too
Autonomous

Trailing

The feeling your company is losing the AI race

Description

Trailing captures the discomfort that arises when employees or leaders perceive that their organization is falling behind competitors in adopting, integrating, or leveraging AI. This taboo reflects the fear that hesitation, missteps, or slow execution in AI initiatives will erode market position, reputation, or long-term viability. The emotional trigger is the sense of being left behind in a transformative race—watching rivals move faster, innovate more boldly, and set new standards while one's own organization struggles to catch up.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Trailing surfaces when people voice anxiety about competitors advancing AI capabilities more aggressively or visibly. Comments like, “Other companies are way ahead of us,” or “We’re already playing catch-up and falling further behind,” reflect this taboo. It can appear in strategic meetings, leadership discussions, or informal conversations, particularly when news about market disruptors or industry benchmarks emerges. Over time, it can drive rushed AI deployments, demoralize teams, or lead to panicked investments made without strategic alignment.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Trailing, organizations should focus on building coherent, prioritized AI strategies rather than reacting impulsively to market pressure. Develop clear roadmaps aligned with core business goals and invest in foundational capabilities rather than chasing superficial trends. Foster a learning culture that encourages iterative experimentation rather than perfection. Benchmark progress realistically against peers while maintaining confidence in a differentiated strategic vision. By focusing on thoughtful, adaptive advancement, companies can reframe the AI race as a sustainable journey rather than a desperate sprint.

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Tr
Trailing

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Trailing fits this level because it raises existential concerns about the company's future competitiveness and survival. Falling too far behind can result in lost market share, damaged brand equity, and long-term decline.

(AI is too autonomous)

Trailing is fueled by the belief that AI evolves rapidly and independently—making early movers harder to catch as systems self-improve and learning curves steepen. The sense that autonomous AI amplifies competitive gaps exacerbates the fear of irrecoverable disadvantage.



AI is
Emotionless

Treachery

AI undermining stakeholder trust in leadership

Description

Treachery captures the discomfort that arises when AI-driven decisions erode stakeholders' trust in leadership. This taboo reflects the perception that leaders are hiding behind algorithms, deflecting accountability, or making choices that prioritize technical logic over human relationships. The emotional trigger is the sense of betrayal—feeling that leadership no longer advocates for or protects employees, customers, or partners, but instead defers to cold, impersonal systems that fail to consider broader social or emotional impacts.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Treachery captures the discomfort that arises when AI-driven decisions erode stakeholders' trust in leadership. This taboo reflects the perception that leaders are hiding behind algorithms, deflecting accountability, or making choices that prioritize technical logic over human relationships. The emotional trigger is the sense of betrayal—feeling that leadership no longer advocates for or protects employees, customers, or partners, but instead defers to cold, impersonal systems that fail to consider broader social or emotional impacts.

Possible Actions to Take

Treachery surfaces when employees, customers, or partners question leadership decisions that are heavily based on AI outputs. Comments like, "They just blame the system now," or "It's like they care more about the data than about us," reflect this taboo. It often appears in contexts like layoffs, promotions, customer service policies, or strategic shifts where leaders attribute actions to AI recommendations. Over time, this perception can fracture trust, damage leadership credibility, and weaken the organizational culture of loyalty and collaboration.

Level 2
Collaboration & Role
Adjustments



Ty
Treachery

Level 2: Collaboration & Role Adjustments

The discomfort in Treachery fits this level because it affects the relational fabric between leadership and stakeholders. While it damages trust and morale, it does not yet threaten overall business continuity or professional viability on a large scale.

(AI is emotionless)

Treachery is fueled by the belief that AI, lacking empathy and human context, produces decisions that leaders adopt without appropriate human judgment. This fosters a feeling that leadership has become emotionally disconnected and mechanically transactional.



People prefer
Human
Interaction

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Ua

Unaccountable

Unaccountable

Absence of clear AI governance raising compliance concerns

Description

Unaccountable captures the discomfort that arises when organizations deploy AI systems without establishing clear governance, ownership, or accountability structures. This taboo reflects the fear that decisions made by AI will lack responsible oversight, creating compliance risks, ethical breaches, or legal vulnerabilities. The emotional trigger is the realization that when something goes wrong—bias, harm, or error—there may be no one clearly answerable, leading to chaos, finger-pointing, or organizational damage.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Unaccountable surfaces when employees, regulators, or customers raise concerns about who is responsible for the outcomes of AI systems. Comments like, “If the system makes a mistake, who fixes it?” or “Nobody seems to own what the AI is doing,” reflect this taboo. It often becomes visible during regulatory audits, customer complaints, or internal risk reviews. Over time, lack of accountability can breed organizational distrust, expose companies to legal actions, and damage public credibility.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Unaccountable, organizations must establish comprehensive AI governance frameworks that clearly define ownership, oversight responsibilities, and escalation procedures. Assign accountable leaders for AI ethics, compliance, and operational risks. Communicate transparently about how AI decisions are made, monitored, and corrected. Build cross-functional governance committees that include legal, ethical, technical, and operational perspectives. By embedding accountability deeply into AI strategies, companies can safeguard trust, ensure compliance, and protect organizational stability.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Unaccountable fits this level because failure to establish governance and oversight around AI can expose organizations to serious reputational, financial, and legal risks. It threatens operational continuity and public trust.

(People prefer human interaction)

Unaccountable is fueled by the belief that responsible decisions require human judgment, transparency, and relational trust—elements that cannot be substituted by autonomous systems operating without clear human stewardship.



AI is too
Opaque

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Uw
Unawareness

Unawareness

The lack of AI knowledge in management

Description

Unawareness captures the discomfort that arises when employees recognize that their leadership lacks sufficient understanding of AI technologies, implications, or risks. This taboo reflects the erosion of confidence that occurs when those responsible for strategic decisions appear uninformed about critical forces reshaping the business landscape. The emotional trigger is the fear that important choices are being made without the necessary literacy to navigate complexity, opportunity, or danger responsibly.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Unawareness surfaces when employees, partners, or external observers comment on leadership's superficial grasp of AI or its strategic consequences. Comments like, "They're making AI decisions without even understanding how it works," or "Our executives talk about AI like it's magic," reflect this taboo. It often becomes visible during AI project rollouts, technology strategy presentations, or regulatory discussions. Over time, perceived unawareness can undermine leadership credibility, sap motivation, and create skepticism about the organization's future direction.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Unawareness, organizations should invest in upskilling leadership on AI fundamentals, ethics, and strategic implications. Provide executive education programs that focus on real-world applications and limitations of AI. Encourage leaders to ask questions, admit knowledge gaps, and seek advice from technical experts. Foster open dialogue between technical teams and leadership to build mutual understanding. By closing the AI literacy gap at the top, organizations can restore trust, enhance decision quality, and demonstrate responsible stewardship in the AI era.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

The discomfort in Unawareness fits this level because it impacts professional confidence in leadership and fairness in decision-making. It weakens trust and can create divisions between operational and strategic levels, even if it does not immediately threaten organizational survival.

(AI is too opaque)

Unawareness is fueled by the belief that AI's complexity demands informed leadership. When decision-makers lack clarity and understanding, the inherent opacity of AI systems compounds the risk of misinformed, opaque governance.



AI is too
Autonomous

Level 3
Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Un
Uncertainty

Uncertainty

Not trusting applications of AI that your organization proposes

Description

Uncertainty captures the discomfort that arises when employees or stakeholders do not trust the AI applications their organization proposes or implements. This taboo reflects skepticism about the reliability, safety, ethics, or alignment of AI initiatives with organizational values and goals. The emotional trigger is the fear that adopting these AI systems may lead to harmful, unfair, or poorly considered outcomes—making people hesitant to embrace new tools even when mandated.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Uncertainty surfaces when employees voice doubts about the effectiveness, fairness, or intent behind AI deployments. Comments like, “How do we know this system won’t backfire?” or “I don’t think they’ve thought this through,” reflect this taboo. It often appears during project rollouts, change management initiatives, or leadership announcements involving AI systems. Over time, uncertainty can delay adoption, reduce system effectiveness, or create underground resistance movements where employees bypass or workaround mandated AI tools.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Uncertainty, organizations should invest in transparent communication about AI systems—how they work, why they are chosen, and how risks are managed. Involve employees in pilot programs and feedback loops early, before full rollout. Provide opportunities for ethical review, user testing, and open forums where skepticism can be safely voiced and addressed. By creating processes that prioritize trust-building, education, and shared ownership, organizations can transform skepticism into informed support.

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

The discomfort in Uncertainty fits this level because it undermines trust in internal systems and initiatives. While it can erode confidence and affect operational effectiveness, it does not immediately threaten organizational survival or basic collaboration.

(AI is too autonomous)

Uncertainty is fueled by the belief that autonomous AI systems can act unpredictably or prioritize organizational objectives over fairness, transparency, or human wellbeing—thus requiring scrutiny and cautious engagement.



AI is too
Inflexible

Level 5
Organizational
Stability at Risk



Uf
Uniformity

Uniformity

Loss of company culture due to prioritizing AI-driven efficiency

Description

Uniformity captures the discomfort that arises when an organization's distinct culture, identity, and human character are eroded by AI-driven priorities centered on efficiency and standardization. This taboo reflects the fear that, in optimizing for performance and scalability, companies unintentionally strip away the rituals, values, and social nuances that make work meaningful and community-driven. The emotional trigger is the sense that something irreplaceably human—traditions, humor, local flavor—is being flattened into sterile, algorithmic uniformity.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Uniformity surfaces when employees or leaders notice a decline in the company's cultural vibrancy, emotional connectivity, or sense of shared purpose. Comments like, "It feels like we're just a machine now," or "We lost what made this place special," reflect this taboo. It may become visible through the disappearance of informal traditions, reduced team cohesion, or a growing sense of emotional disengagement. Over time, uniformity can undermine loyalty, sap innovation, and make it harder to attract and retain talent aligned with the organization's deeper mission.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Uniformity, organizations should intentionally safeguard and celebrate the human aspects of their culture. Identify core traditions, values, and informal rituals that define the company's identity and embed them into daily life alongside AI implementations. Involve employees in co-creating new rituals that honor human connection in a tech-driven environment. Build leadership narratives that balance operational excellence with cultural stewardship. By making culture an explicit priority—not an accidental casualty—companies can thrive both technologically and emotionally.

Level 5: Organizational Stability at Risk

The discomfort in Uniformity fits this level because erosion of culture affects long-term organizational resilience, cohesion, and competitive differentiation. A strong culture is often critical for navigating change, sustaining performance, and inspiring commitment.

(AI is too inflexible)

Uniformity is fueled by the belief that AI systems optimize processes and behaviors at the cost of flexibility, emotional resonance, and the informal aspects of human collaboration that nurture vibrant organizational life.



AI is too
Opaque

Vagueness

Concerns about unclear or unfair rules in automated decision-making

Description

Vagueness captures the discomfort that arises when people experience AI-driven decisions as unclear, inconsistent, or unfair because the underlying rules are opaque. This taboo reflects the anxiety that, without knowing the criteria behind automated choices, individuals are left feeling powerless, misjudged, or treated arbitrarily. The emotional trigger is the sense that personal or professional outcomes are being shaped by systems whose logic cannot be questioned, understood, or contested.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Vagueness surfaces when employees, customers, or stakeholders express confusion or suspicion about how decisions are made. Comments like, “Why did the system reject my request?” or “Nobody can explain how these scores are calculated,” reflect this taboo. It often becomes visible in areas such as hiring, promotions, access to services, or performance evaluations where AI plays a role. Over time, vagueness can erode trust, reduce engagement, and increase the risk of appeals, grievances, or public backlash.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Vagueness, organizations should prioritize explainability and transparency in AI design and communication. Provide clear, understandable explanations of how automated decisions are made and the factors they consider. Establish appeal mechanisms that allow individuals to contest or clarify decisions. Engage diverse teams in reviewing AI systems for potential fairness risks and perceptions. By demystifying decision logic and respecting people’s need for clarity, organizations can reinforce procedural fairness and maintain trust in AI-assisted processes.

Level 3

Professional Trust &
Fairness Issues



Vg

Vagueness

Level 3: Professional Trust & Fairness Issues

The discomfort in Vagueness fits this level because it undermines confidence in procedural fairness and organizational integrity. It affects trust relationships within professional settings without necessarily threatening basic operations.

(AI is too opaque)

Vagueness is fueled by the belief that AI systems operate without sufficient transparency, leaving people unable to understand, trust, or challenge outcomes that directly affect them.



AI is
Emotionless

Worthlessness

Feeling replaceable despite having deep expertise

Description

Worthlessness captures the discomfort that arises when individuals with deep expertise feel devalued or replaceable because of AI systems. This taboo reflects the emotional pain that comes from realizing that years of experience, judgment, and skill might be treated as redundant in the face of algorithmic alternatives. The emotional trigger is the feeling that hard-earned professional identity is being undermined—that human depth is seen as less valuable than mechanical efficiency.

How It Shows Up in Work Practice

Worthlessness surfaces when skilled professionals express doubt about their continued relevance in an AI-driven environment. Comments like, “It feels like my experience doesn’t matter anymore,” or “Why spend decades mastering something if a machine can do it instantly?” reflect this taboo. It may appear during technology transitions, role redefinitions, or strategic shifts toward automation. Over time, worthlessness can diminish motivation, increase turnover among experienced staff, and create pockets of silent disengagement within the workforce.

Possible Actions to Take

To address Worthlessness, organizations should actively recognize and honor human expertise even as they adopt AI. Create roles that pair experienced professionals with AI systems to guide, supervise, or improve outputs. Develop upskilling pathways that allow experts to evolve alongside technology, not be sidelined by it. Celebrate mentorship, critical thinking, and judgment as skills that AI cannot replicate. By reinforcing the value of lived experience and continuous learning, companies can help professionals see a future where their worth grows, not diminishes, with technological change.

Level 4

Career Security & Job
Redefinition Anxiety



Ws

Worthlessness

Level 4: Career Security & Job Redefinition Anxiety

The discomfort in Worthlessness fits this level because it threatens personal career stability and professional self-worth, leading individuals to question their future paths and the meaning of their contributions.

(AI is emotionless)

Worthlessness is fueled by the belief that AI systems, lacking the ability to value human nuance, experience, or growth, reduce individuals to replaceable outputs—stripping away recognition of hard-won mastery.