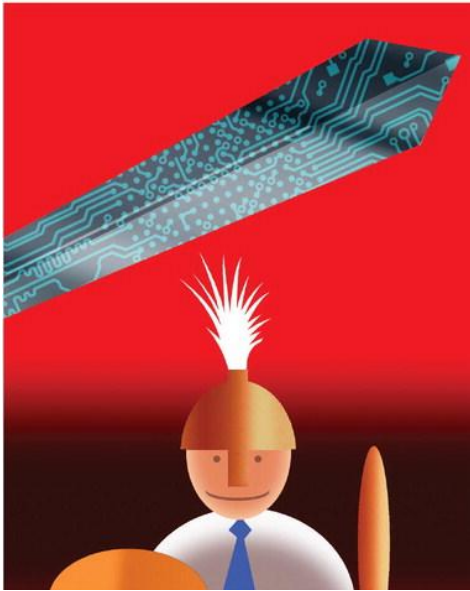


Do not approach the intelligence age with a Bronze Age mindset

We need a GI Bill for today's skill needs

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One thousand years before Christ, the Israelites stood atop the steep slopes of Mount Gilboa and stared down at the massive Philistine army amassed in the Jezreel Valley below. The Israelites were under the command of their warrior king, Saul, and his sons — Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua — who had led them to many great victories.

The world of the Israelites was shaped by bronze, while the Philistines, masters of iron technology, occupied a different future. The Book of Samuel records that no blacksmith could be found throughout the land of Israel.

The battle was a rout. Saul's sons were slaughtered before his eyes, and the wounded king chose to fall on his sword. The Israelites had marched out confident, entirely unaware that the world had shifted under their feet. They ran headlong into the Iron Age without a single sword in their hands.

Today, we stand where the Israelites stood. The intelligence age — in which machines read, write, reason and increasingly act — will not merely improve our tools but also change the nature of work, power and society itself.

The U.S. economy is a service economy, with white-collar workers accounting for half of all employment and, by some estimates, driving 75% of discretionary consumer spending. This sector is not tangential to the American economy. It is the American economy.

Every institution we have built — including the labor market, the mortgage market and the tax code — was designed for a world in which human intelligence was scarce and therefore valuable. That value is now being destroyed.

This is not a forecast; it is happening now. The smartest person in the room is now the world's most replaceable person.

Machines do not buy homes. They do not go to restaurants. They do not take vacations, pay tuition, support local businesses or build communities.

As large numbers of white-collar workers lose their incomes, the effects are not confined to the office. They spread outward through the entire economy. We are entering a negative feedback loop with no natural brake. Artificial intelligence replaces white-collar workers; those workers stop spending; the consumer economy weakens; and companies accelerate AI adoption to survive, eliminating more workers.

This is not efficiency; it is a death spiral. The most dangerous thing about this moment is not that the intelligence age will change our society more profoundly than anything else since the Industrial Revolution. It is that we are running headlong into this new age with a Bronze Age mindset.

The ancient story does not end on that battlefield. Within a generation, the Israelites had learned the secrets of iron. By Solomon's time, iron was everywhere in Israel. The people who faced the new age without a sword in their hands ended it as masters of the very technology that had nearly destroyed them. That is the lesson.

The new age does not doom us; denial does. People are hiding behind a brick wall of hope, each brick etched with a comforting reason: "It makes mistakes," "it hallucinates," or "it can't do what I do."

While we dither behind it, the wave is forming. The wall is cracking.

We must act now and treat this like the national security emergency it is.

Government must scale up structural safety nets and retraining programs: a modern GI Bill for the skills of the intelligence age. Simultaneously, employers must map how AI will dismantle their workforces before mass layoffs become the default survival strategy.

Individuals must also stop waiting. War-game your future. Learn which parts of your work are vulnerable, which become more valuable and which new capabilities you must forge now.

In the disaster business, we prepare for blue skies to work in gray skies. Right now, the sky is still blue.

We must do the thing that machines cannot: come together in service to one another and to the most vulnerable among us. The Iron Age did not wait for consensus. The age of intelligence will not either.

Kelly McKinney has served as deputy commissioner of the New York City Office of Emergency Management and as a member of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Advisory Council.