THE SYMBIOTIC FUTURE
How AI will reshape, not replace workforce in Bangladesh

AI isn't just the next wave of disruption—it's the next wave of opportunity.

ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

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> In such a future, AI elevates humans. And for Bangladesh, where the workforce is agile, ambitious, and adaptable, this represents a tremendous opportunity. To realise this vision, we must invest in our people. That means prioritising skilling, reskilling, and upskilling across sectors.

The evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) has been one of the most defining narratives of our generation. Once the stuff of science fiction, AI has swiftly moved from labs and research papers into everyday life. From enabling virtual assistants to powering financial services and healthcare diagnostics, AI today is not just transforming how we work - it's redefining what work means.

We are standing at the threshold of an era where AI won't replace humans, but will work alongside us, unlocking new frontiers of productivity, creativity, and impact.

Change is not new—we've been here before
As AI reshapes industries globally, we see two dominant narratives emerging - one rooted in fear, and another in optimism. The fear is simple: AI will take our jobs. The optimism, however, sees AI as a force that will change the nature of work, augment human capabilities, and create new opportunities.

History offers a helpful perspective. From the industrial revolution to the rise of computers, fears of job displacement have always accompanied technological breakthroughs. Yet time and again, new technologies have given rise to new industries, redefined existing ones, and elevated the role of the human worker. The typewriter enabled the growth of administrative careers. The internet gave rise to the digital economy. AI will be no different.

AI might eliminate some repetitive, manual roles, but in doing so, it will pave the way for more meaningful, higher-value jobs. Roles that demand human creativity, empathy, critical thinking, and strategic judgment will not only endure but thrive.

Bangladesh's digital foundation is taking shape
While this unfolds not just nationally but also in the global context, there's no denying that AI can deliver a unique and beneficial value proposition for the world, particularly Bangladesh. The country is well-positioned to seize this moment. With over half of the households in the country having access to the internet, a digitally ambitious government, and a youthful population, the country is already laying the foundation for a thriving AI-powered economy.

From textile factories experimenting with automation to financial institutions leveraging data intelligence, key sectors are leaning into change. The expanding startup ecosystem, growing focus on digital literacy, and ongoing improvements in connectivity, signal a nation ready to integrate AI into its economic fabric.

Agents and automation
As digital adoption grows, so do customer expectations. Bangladeshi consumers increasingly expect personalisation, speed, and relevance in every interaction. For businesses, this means rethinking how customer service is delivered at scale and anticipating the future.

Organisations will be increasingly challenged in meeting these raised expectations. They will have to rapidly upskill teams to deliver personalised customer service on the go. Since expanding teams apace with the growing customer base might not make immediate business sense, maintaining the levels of personalisation will emerge as another challenge. The answer will lie in not just enabling employees with greater productivity, but also greater customer focus in every interaction—a multiplier effect that can only be achieved through technology.

Agentic productivity
AI agents are poised to drive exponential transformation for organisations, enhancing team capabilities, boosting productivity, and significantly elevating the quality of services delivered by employees.

Here is how AI agents can do this. Firstly, they will take away the repetitive tasks that do not require creative thinking, such as routine KYC during customer onboarding. Second, AI agents can serve as a source of standardised knowledge, vital in a job market where talent is highly mobile. And third, AI agents can enable teams to act assuredly in complex situations.

Further, as a completely digital tool, an AI agent leaves a traceable and accurate trail of its actions. Rigorous and regular audits of these footprints and the outcomes can continuously improve the AI agent, making it even more empowering.

Agents can also help highly trained experts do their work more easily. Agents' usefulness for diverse roles and situations is because they are easily customisable. You can create agents as per your needs, requirements and, crucially, your own guardrails.

Bringing AI closer to everyday work
As a region, South Asia is no stranger to resilience. Bangladesh, in particular, has shown time and again that it can rise to meet the future head-on. Now, imagine a textile worker leveraging AI to detect fabric inconsistencies, or AI agents like Salesforce's Agentforce providing round-the-clock support, swiftly resolving routine queries and enabling service representatives to focus on more complex, high-value interactions. Picture educators using AI agents to streamline operations, personalise learning journeys, and unlock new pathways for student success. This is not a distant vision, it's the near future of Bangladesh.

In such a future, AI elevates humans. And for Bangladesh, where the workforce is agile, ambitious, and adaptable, this represents a tremendous opportunity. To realise this vision, we must invest in our people. That means prioritising skilling, reskilling, and upskilling across sectors.

Education is deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of Bangladesh, and this foundation offers a powerful springboard for the future. By building on its strong academic ethos and expanding access to digital learning, Bangladesh is well-positioned to prepare its workforce for the jobs of the future. With focused investments in technical education and industry-aligned training, the country holds tremendous potential to lead in the digital economy.

Preparing for what's next
Ultimately, the conversation around AI is not about AI versus humans, it's about AI *with* humans. The real opportunity lies in building ecosystems that bring together technology, talent, and trust. And in that partnership lies the promise of progress. The ecosystem must cooperate to ensure responsible AI adoption, prioritising robust AI governance frameworks and safety measures. This could include establishing standards for data usage, auditing AI algorithms for fairness and bias, and ensuring that AI technologies align with our societal values and laws.

AI continues to evolve, the choice before us is clear - we can either view it as a threat, or we can embrace it as an opportunity to reimagine work, empower our people, and build a more inclusive economy.

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> "Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider."
>
> **FRANCIS BACON**

From chaos to cohesion: winning at FGDs the smart way

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

If you have ever sat in a group of ten nervous candidates, all trying to out-charm, out-smart, and out-volume one another for a single job, you have likely been a gladiator in the corporate coliseum known as the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Welcome to the recruiter's favourite social experiment: where intellect meets improvisation, diplomacy clashes with dominance, and someone always starts with, "Hi everyone, let me begin by...". Here, some candidates come in ready to bulldoze through any argument with unwavering confidence, some sit silently waiting for a divine moment of inspiration, while others nervously rehearse that one line they came up with the night before, waiting for the perfect moment that never arrives.

Commonly used by banks, multinationals, and FMCGs to test candidates for management trainee programs, FGDs are less about solving a case and more about putting your soft skills under a microscope. It is less of a Harvard case method and more of a business-themed episode of 'Survivor', minus the tropical setting and with higher stakes. In theory, FGDs are meant to assess your ability to work in random groups, communicate effectively, think critically, and handle pressure. For recruiters, it is a chance to observe how candidates behave under pressure, how they interact, and most importantly, how they think; not alone, but as part of a team. In reality, they often become a chaotic blend of polite interruptions, forced smiles, and the occasional philosophical deep-dive from someone trying just a bit too hard to stand out.

Performing well in an FGD is not about dominating the discussion, quoting Kotler, or dazzling everyone with a mini-MBA lecture. It is about balance. It is about knowing when to speak, when to listen, and when to artfully disagree without declaring verbal war.

Understanding the setup
Ten candidates. One abstract case. Twenty minutes. And a couple of poker-faced assessors observing who naturally leads, who builds consensus, and who derails the entire thing by spiralling into a monologue. Some FGDs throw candidates into market-entry simulations, while others dish out ethical dilemmas or public policy conundrums. The content varies, but the behavioural cues are what really matter.

Remember, you are not there to solve the problem perfectly but to be seen as someone people want on their team. To ace an FGD, you do not need to be the loudest, the smartest, or the one with the most bullet points. You just need to be the most intentional. If you are saying "synergy" and "scalability" in the same sentence without knowing what either actually means, you are not impressing anyone. Clear, simple communication always wins.

Talk, but do not take hostages
The biggest myth about FGDs is that speaking more equals scoring more. In reality, recruiters are usually not looking for screen time; instead, they are watching for clarity, brevity, and influence. Great participants often jump in early not to dominate but to set direction. Starting the discussion is great; but only if you have something worthwhile to say. Jumping in with "Let me start" and then rambling through disconnected thoughts will not get you anywhere.

A strong opening sounds more like, "Let's first identify the key issues to be addressed": calm, clear, and collaborative. Then, listen and absorb what others say, acknowledging and building on it. Can you keep your cool when things spiral? Can you lead without dominating? These are the questions that matter, and recruiters are watching for answers, not in what you say, but in how you say it.

The danger of the debate club veteran
You know this type. Arms folded, eyebrows

ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

arched, and ready to demolish your argument with just three buzzwords. These are the classic FGD warriors who mistake intensity for intellect and see the discussion as a zero-sum game, where for one idea to shine, the others must be shot down. But FGDs are not competitive debates. They are collaborative problem-solving tasks. As such, aggression masquerading as confidence often backfires. While disagreements may earn a few nods, quite often it gets marked as inflexibility unless it is quickly followed up with a good rationale and openness to feedback from others. Always look to build on others' points because it helps you introduce new ideas without dismissing others, and that is something recruiters appreciate; people who drive discussions forward with the team, not in spite of them.

The silent saint vs. the anxious overachiever
Two characters almost always show up. The silent saint, who says nothing until the final minute and drops a golden insight like divine intervention. And the anxious overachiever, who speaks after every sentence, paraphrases what has already been said, and somehow still manages to bring up their personal experiences. Neither strategy works in isolation. One risks being forgotten, while the other risks becoming white noise.

Your goal should be to participate a few times meaningfully. That is enough to get noticed without being overbearing. And do not underestimate the value of facilitation. Make eye contact, refer to others by name if possible, and try to nudge the conversation forward. If things get messy, and they often do, offering structure, like suggesting a quick vote or recap, can make you look like a hero.

What they are really looking for
Recruiters are not just looking for confidence. They are also sniffing out ego. They want someone who can hold their own without steamrolling the group. Someone with analytical clarity who also encourages quieter members to share. Someone who can lead but also adapt. You could be wrong, and still make it if you are thoughtful, self-aware, and show strong team dynamics. But you could be 100% right and still fail if you come off as rigid. Remember: people hire those they can imagine working with at 11:30 PM the night before an important launch.