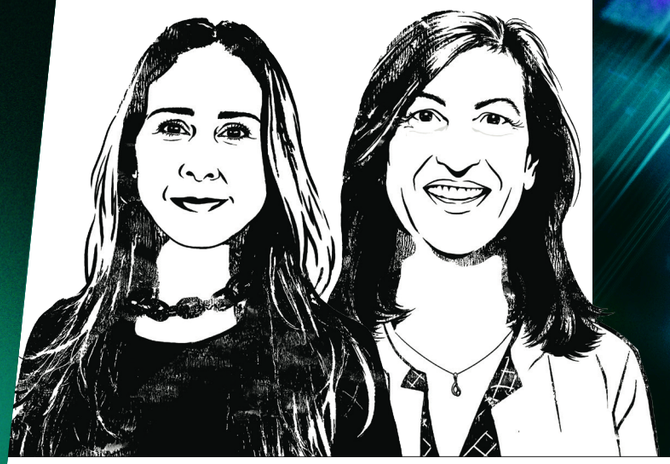
Stop the AI Guesswork

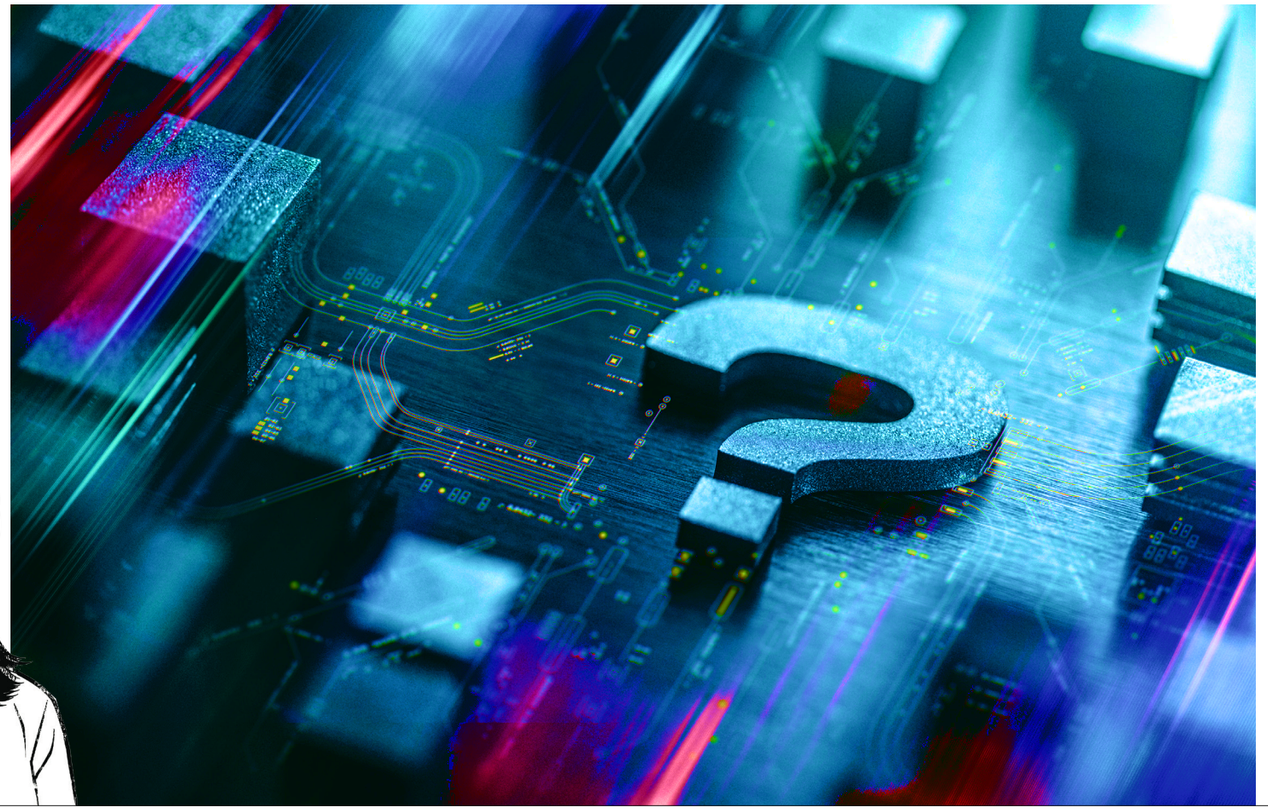
Korn Ferry Institute scientists Andrea Deege and Karin Visser say leaders need to be more systematic about workforce use of AI.



In the ideal world, at least in the minds of some leaders, AI would automate thousands of rote tasks and humans would do the work requiring critical thinking and creativity.

However, many leaders are assuming AI can replace people in thousands of roles while ignoring the impact this technology will have on many other jobs. They're making personnel decisions based on that guesswork, and in many cases, it's not going well. "It's been like handing someone the controls of a commercial jet when they haven't yet logged hours in a single-engine plane," says Andrea Deege, vice president of Individual IP Development at the Korn Ferry Institute. There's a lot of good that can be done, she says, but the potential damage is considerable.

We spoke with Deege and Karin Visser, the Institute's vice president of Organization, Work and Reward IP Development, about how organizations can be more systematic and transparent around AI and their own employees.



Using AI for anything, including managing people, requires a lot of data. Do organizations have that already?

Andrea Deege: There is more data than ever, but it's not necessarily helpful. More data requires more time—to gather it from disparate sources, then to combine and analyze it. I think this is the key challenge of the moment.

Karin Visser: With all that data, you have to ask, "How are you going to use it?" It's nice to know something, but even more important is knowing what action you are going to take.

What can organizations do to take the guesswork out of AI when it comes to how it impacts an employee's role?

KV: First, leaders have to believe that AI will help create more value for an organization. They can't just look at it as a way to reduce the workforce. It's not about looking at a role as a whole, either. You have to break down the responsibilities baked into each role and ask which of those responsibilities can be automated.

This isn't a one-time analysis, either. We created an AI Impact Score metric last year by evaluating the responsibilities which comprise our thousands of success profiles, then assigning a score representing how much each role was likely to be impacted by AI. We will continue to update these metrics over time, given the AI impact on work will change as gen-AI models continue to improve.

So what skills will help leaders the most during the AI era?

AD: We have a success profile called the AI Ready Leader which includes six key responsibilities. The responsibilities are not technical in nature; rather, they're about positive human interactions and the ability to inspire and bring people along on the AI journey. One responsibility, called "Address Fears," outlines the need to minimize concerns about job displacement. Another is "Champion Learning and Unlearning," because this transformation will require an unprecedented level of adaptability and agility.

Leaders—and organizations as a whole, really—need to earn the trust of their people on this point.

How do you build that trust around AI?

KV: You can't just say, "Well, AI did it," or "AI is cheaper, so we're going to do it this way."

AD: You need to have demonstrated evidence that AI is predictive and that it's fair, and that it isn't going to advantage or disadvantage certain groups. If you're going to use AI around performance assessments, for example, you need to show a paper trail.

KV: I think that at some point AI will become business as usual, much as the internet eventually did after it first emerged. It might take a bit longer, and it's a far bigger change, but I think we'll get there.