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The Unbundled Workforce: **Rethinking Work in the Age of AI**



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“Gentlemen, there's only two ways I know of to make money: bundling and unbundling.”

J. Barksdale – Netscape CEO (1995)

The job is arguably the longest running bundle.

We invented the job in the industrial revolution to turn a person's time into a predictable, purchasable unit.

For the 1st time, work and home life, were separate. But work gave you identity, a social circle, health benefits…



Decomposition was the founding logic of industry.

Work was sorted into four piles:

- *what machines do,*
- *what humans do + machines,*
- *what only humans do,*
- *what we bring specialists in for.*



The manufacturing industry automated hands. AI automates cognition.

AI is reaching for the professional, judgement heavy tier that resisted the first wave of low-end ‘service’ automation.

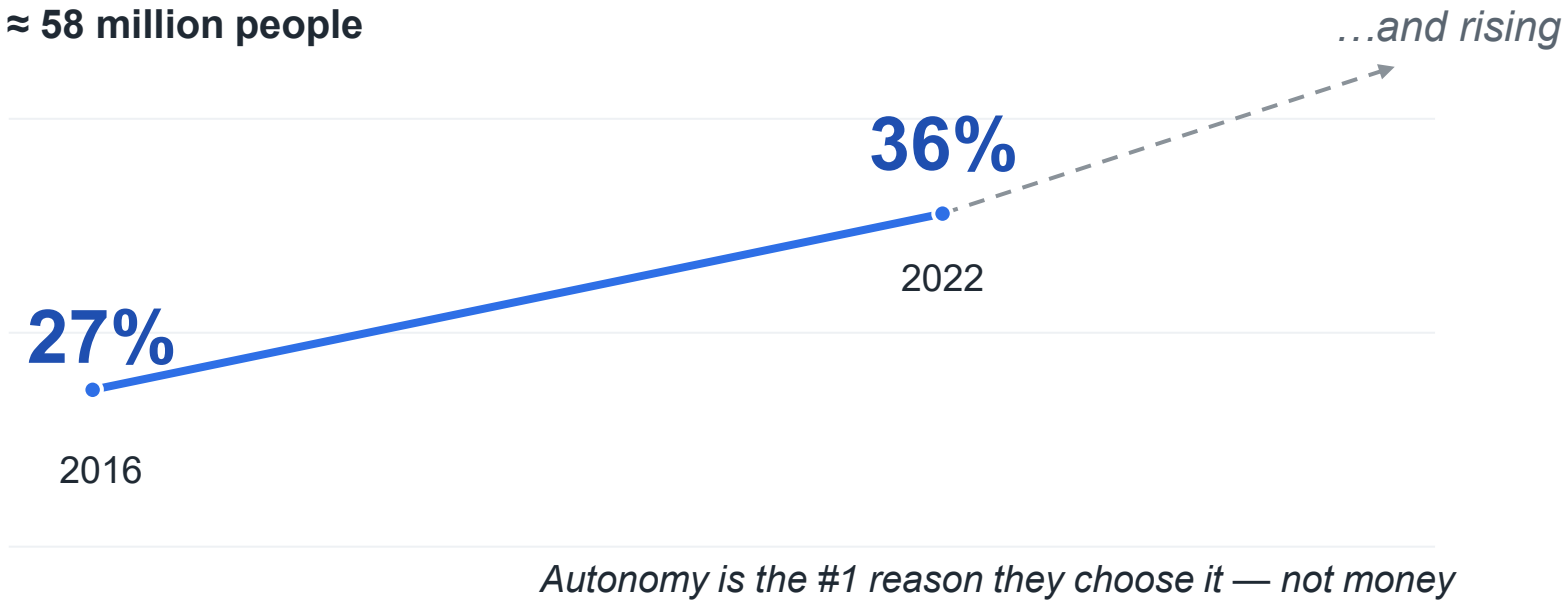
AI is the ‘unbundler’ with enough reach to touch it at scale.



More people are choosing independent work

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Share of US workers who are independent (McKinsey, 2022)

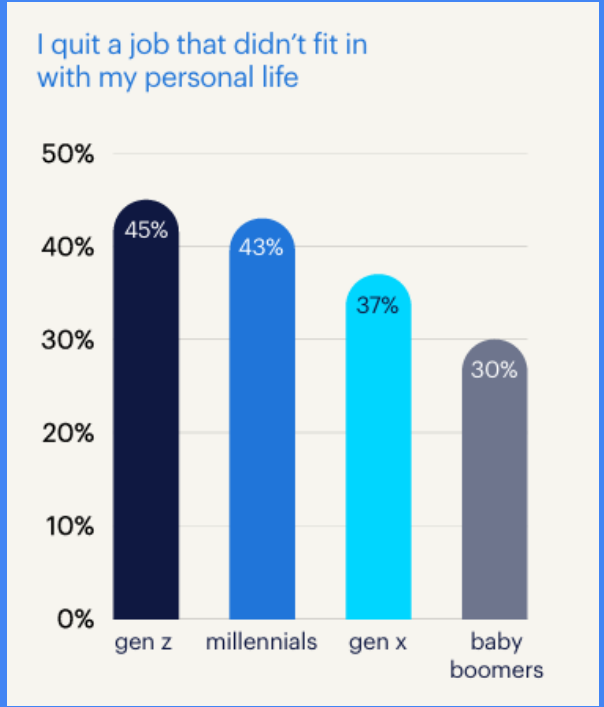


Source: McKinsey American Opportunity Survey (2022)

The wanting came first.

Gen Z are more likely than older generations to “work to live” rather than “live to work”.

A good work-life balance is the leading driver for Gen Z when selecting an organization.



Randstat: Workmonitor 2026

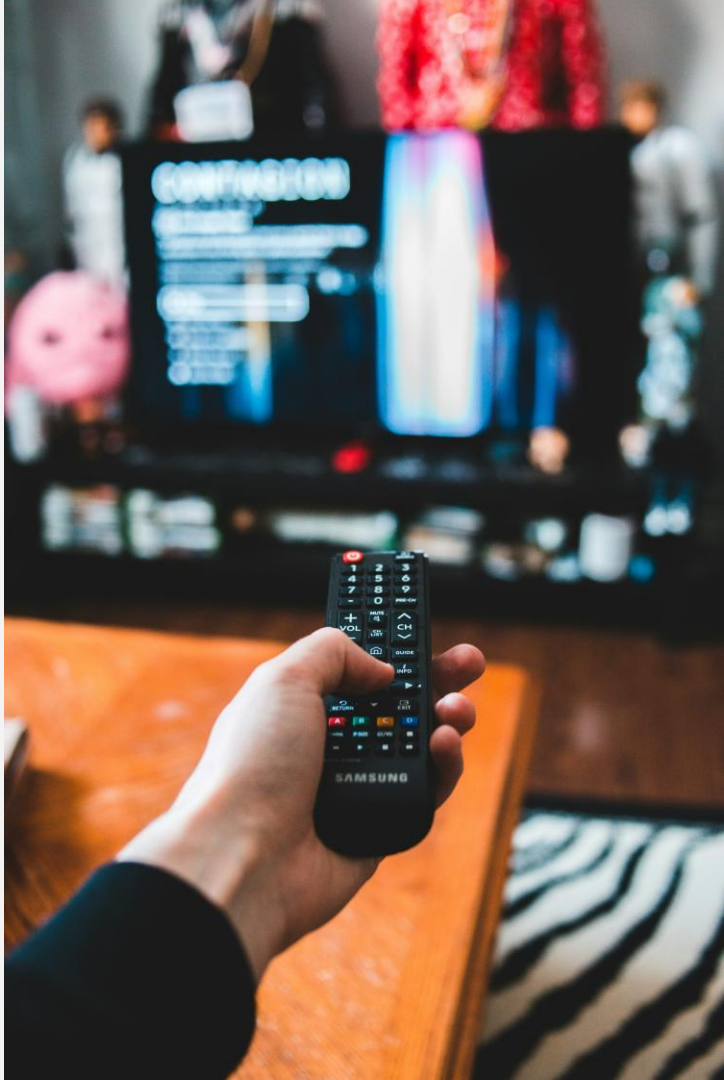
https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/genz-millennial-survey.html

We are not new to ‘unbundling’ ...

From 2010 to 2025, US households had a 52% drop in pay-TV subscription.

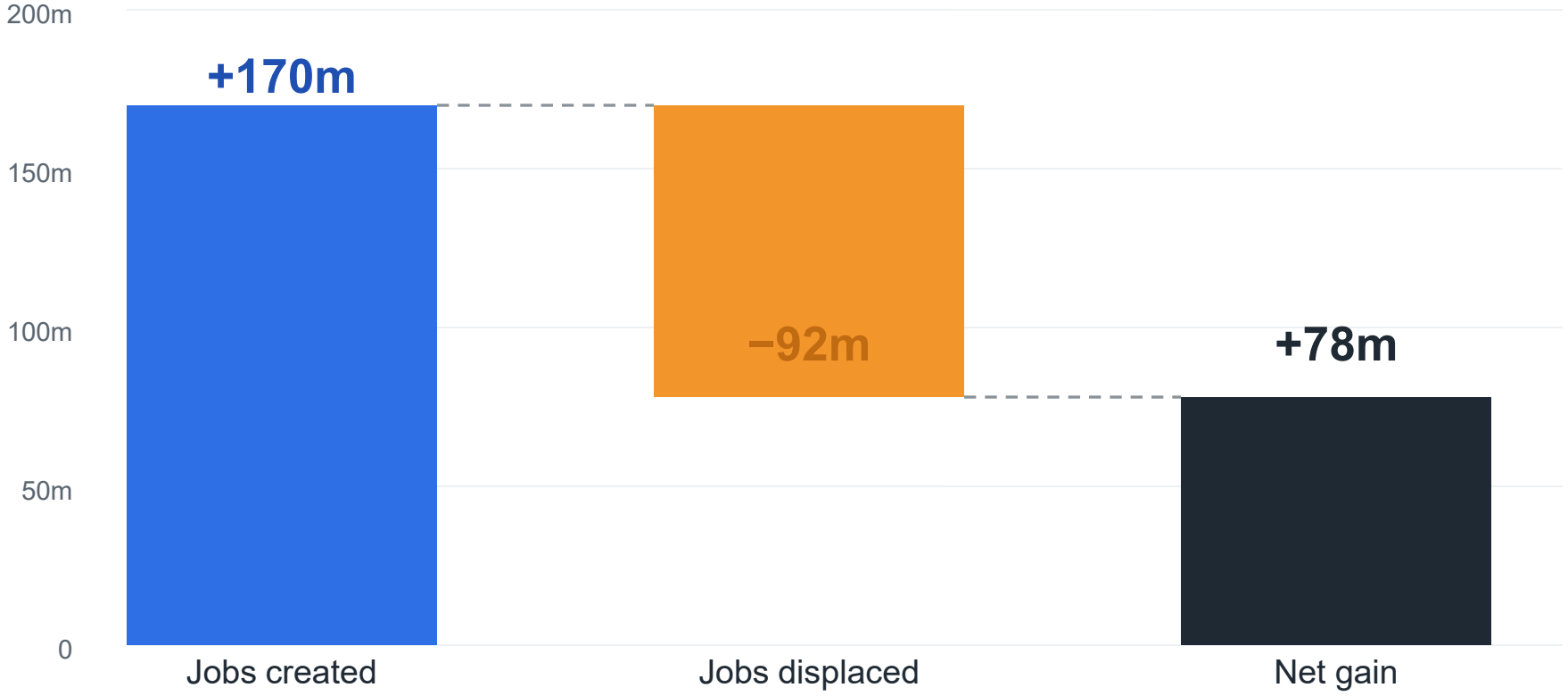
Malta's classic cable subscriptions fell 4% in 2024 alone, but IPTV, the unbundled, internet-delivered version - grew 10%.

***Generational cliff**: In EU 86% of 16–24-year-olds streamed TV or video online vs 33% of 65–74-year-olds (Eurostat, 2022)*



Churn, not collapse

Estimated Global jobs change by 2030 (WEF)



Source: World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025

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The inversion of Weil's 'Fissured Workplace'?

Dimension	Operational Worker (Weil's Model)	Specialised Knowledge Worker (Inversed Model)
Bargaining Power	**Low.** Easily replaced; wages driven down by competing subcontractors.	**High.** Possesses limited, in-demand expertise that corporations cannot build/ afford internally.
Economic Value	Viewed as a **cost center** - minimized through outsourcing.	Viewed as a **strategic asset** or competitive advantage.
Pricing Power	**Low hourly wages** + some benefits/ security.	Dictates **premium consulting fees/** high retainers. Absorbs risk willingly.
Autonomy	**Low.** Managed by a subcontractor with rigid oversight.	**High.** Controls their own schedule, methodology, and **choice of clients**.
Dependency	Dependent on a single vendor who holds primary contract.	Diversified across **multiple corporate clients**, reducing single-employer risk.

If the job and the CV were a set menu…

Then work (and recruitment) are going à la carte.



The unbundled executive is already here

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2 in 5

Talent in 35 markets consider the traditional corporate ladder outdated. 72% employers agree.

Randstat Workmonitor 2026

+340%

growth in UK fractional roles since 2019

UK labour-market data (Vendux, 26)

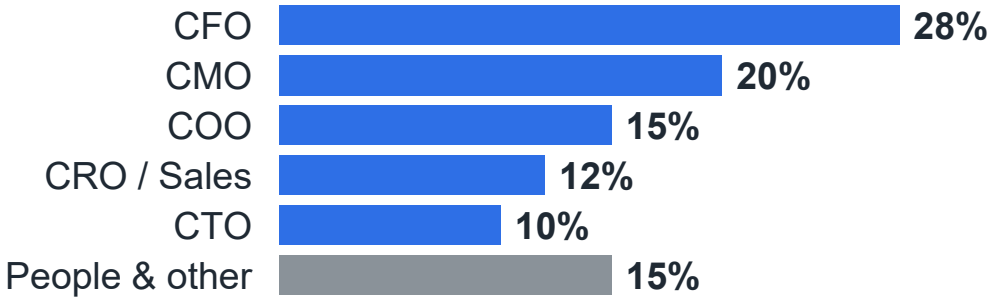
~120k

fractional leaders globally in 2024 — ~2× 2022

Frak's State of Fractional Industry Report 2024

Which roles are going fractional

Share of fractional engagements by function (US/Canada est.) — Vendux



Figures are directional — no official government statistic tracks fractional roles.

The Business Case for 'Unbundling'

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Speed to the real issue
No ramp-up, no politics. Hired for the outcome, so they go straight to the core problem.

Reputation is the retention mechanism
An employee can resign tomorrow at no real cost to them. Fractional professionals depend on their reputation to deliver top quality, on-time & on-budget.

Risk, de-risked
The engagement scales to what the business needs. Wrong C-Suite hire is costly. Test need and pivot easily when needs change.

Paying for the premium, not the post
Peak, cross-context expertise dosed exactly where it's needed — instead of diluting a senior specialist across a generalist role.

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Your turn — Map your own organisation

Take 5-8 min to reflect on the following 3 points:

1 Pick 1 role in your organization. What can be automated, augmented or unbundled — and where is human advantage rising?

2 How do we shift from employer to collaborator? What does an Organisational Collaboration Proposition (OCP) require?

3 Your 2027 Move: before you add the next FTE on the 2027 budget plan, does this role actually need to be one full-time, bundled hire? Or could it be unbundled the way you just mapped in Q1?

Q1: Work Audit

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Pick ONE role in your organisation. Break it into five tasks. Tag each one:

Automate
a machine does it end-to-end

Augment
human + AI, far faster together

Unbundle
hand to a specialist, on demand

Human-edge
judgement & trust — keep it close

Q2: Shifting Mindset: Employer → Collaborator

- What does your **Employer Value Proposition (EVP)** currently look like today and how can that shift into an **Organisational Collaboration Proposition (OCP)?**
- What remains relevant?
- What do you highlight?
- What could be a detractor?



Q3: Your Monday Move

Before you add the next FTE on that 2027 budget plan, does this role actually need to be a full-time, bundled hire? Or could it be unbundled the way you just mapped in Q1?

What would that mean from an org structure/ talent plan/ performance management point of view?



Take home points:

- Unbundling isn’t collapse — AI is questioning the ‘job’ as the container for work, a trend which is generationally ‘of its time’. Human-edge tasks & AI augmented work is where advantage is rising.

- Your EVP needs to become an OCP — stop selling a set menu, start naming why a specialist would collaborate with you at all.

- Pick one Monday Move — Pick the smallest change that adapts your organizational structure, hiring plan and performance/ reward process to include unbundled specialists.

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THANK YOU!



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