AVT BUSINESS SCHOOL · COPENHAGEN

2001 — 2026 · A quarter century of leading leaders

Impossible to Replace

A letter to CEOs on pro-worker AI — and a manifesto for the decade in which technology either commodifies your people or makes them more valuable than ever.

TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVES OF THE NORDICS —
AND EVERYONE WHO LEADS PEOPLE THROUGH WHAT COMES NEXT

Dear CEO,

You are being sold a future in which your greatest achievement is making your own people unnecessary. We are writing to tell you that this future is not inevitable, not economically superior, and not worthy of your ambition.

For twenty-five years, AVT Business School has taught executives one discipline above all others: radical practicality — the refusal to confuse what is fashionable with what works. Applied to AI, that discipline leads us to a conclusion that is currently unfashionable, and we hold it with confidence:

> *The most valuable companies of 2035 will not be the ones that removed the most people from their processes. They will be the ones that made their people* ***impossible to replace*** *— by building AI that extends human expertise instead of commodifying it.*

This is not sentiment. It is economics. Technologies that merely automate existing tasks make expertise obsolete and hand every competitor the same savings. Technologies that create new tasks — new services, new decisions, new forms of expertise — are the only category that is unambiguously pro-worker, and historically the only category that built enduring companies. Ford is not remembered for cutting costs by a few percentage points. Six in ten workers today hold jobs that did not exist in 1940 — created, not spared, by technology.

AI can be the greatest collaboration tool ever built: a system that thinks alongside your experts, extends their judgment into places it could not go unassisted, and shortens the road from novice to master. Or it can be the greatest commodification engine ever built. **The technology does not choose. You do.**

What follows is our view of the future — seven predictions we believe will prove true, five challenges we believe you must confront, and the commitments we are making ourselves. It is written to be disagreed with. Please do so out loud.

What we believe will be true

Each of these is debatable. That is the point.

1

The automation dividend will be worth nothing by 2030.

Cost savings from AI are available to every competitor at the price of a subscription. What everyone can buy, no one can win with. Advantage will come from what your people can do that no one else's can.

2

Every employee becomes a manager.

Directing, reviewing, and being accountable for the work of AI agents will be the fastest-growing skill in the economy. Judgment — knowing what to ask for, what to trust, and what to reject — becomes the mass competency, not the elite one.

3

The companies that automated their juniors will run out of seniors.

Expertise is built at the entry level. Organizations that delete apprentice work instead of redesigning it are eating their own pipeline — and will spend the 2030s buying back, at premium prices, the expertise they declined to grow.

4

New work will outgrow lost work — but only where leaders create it.

Every previous technological wave replenished the demand for human expertise through new tasks. AI will repeat the pattern — but the new tasks will appear in the organizations that design for them, not in the ones that wait.

5

Surveillance AI will mark employers the way unsafe factories once did.

Algorithmic monitoring that treats employees as suspects will become a legal, reputational, and talent-market liability. The best people will simply not work under it — and they will say why on their way out.

6

Expertise theft will get its Napster verdict.

Training systems on workers' output — then using the result to compete against them, without consent or compensation — is this era's music piracy. The legal frameworks will catch up. The companies on the wrong side will pay retroactively.

7

The obsolescence ideology will be the decade's great misallocation.

The single-minded race to replace human capability will be remembered as a spectacular misdirection of talent and capital — while the quiet builders of collaboration tools collect the compounding returns.

III · FIVE CHALLENGES

What we must confront

These are the uncomfortable conversations. Have them anyway.

Stop calling it a technology strategy.

If your AI plan lives with the CIO and has changed no business choice, no role, and no budget line, you do not have an AI strategy — you have a procurement list. This is an organizational design question, and it is owned by you personally.

Answer the question your people are actually asking.

Not "will AI help me?" but "am I being trained or replaced — and who decides?" Silence is an answer. It drives your best people's expertise underground, into shadow use and quiet exits, exactly when you need it in the open.

Measure what you create, not only what you cut.

If headcount saved is the only line in your AI business case, you are telling your organization precisely what you think its people are worth. Count the new tasks, the new services, the new expertise — or accept that you are underinvesting in all three.

Protect the apprenticeship.

Someone must still become an expert. Entry-level work is not a cost to be deleted; it is the mechanism by which your organization grows judgment. Redesign it around AI — accelerate it, deepen it — but do not remove the ladder and then wonder where the climbers went.

Give the people who do the work a voice in the design.

Your frontline knows where AI helps and where it quietly harms — the workarounds, the edge cases, the customers it fails. Design with them and you get adoption plus insight. Design to them and you get compliance plus attrition. There is no third option.

What AVT pledges

A manifesto without commitments is a mood. These are ours, made publicly, on our 25th anniversary.

— **We will teach the pro-worker design test in every program we run.** Every executive who passes through AVT will leave knowing how to ask, of any AI system: does this make human expertise more valuable — or merely cheaper to replace? And they will know what to do with the answer.

— **We will redesign our own school by the same standard we teach.** AI will change how executive education is made and delivered — including ours. We will run the transition in the open and publish what worked and what failed, because a business school that hides its own experiments has no business grading anyone else's.

— **We will bring the frontline into the boardroom curriculum.** The perspective of the people who do the work — not only the people who direct it — will be present in our classrooms, our cases, and our diagnostics. Worker voice is not a stakeholder courtesy; it is a source of design intelligence.

— **We will measure ourselves in capability created, not content delivered.** Our metric is not programs completed. It is new expertise built, new tasks enabled, and decisions our alumni made differently — and we will ask them, publicly, whether we delivered.

— **We will convene the argument, annually, in Copenhagen.** Once a year, for the next twenty-five, we will put CEOs, workers, and researchers in the same room to test these predictions against reality — and publish the score, including where we were wrong.

We are betting the next quarter century of this institution on a single proposition: ***that the leaders who make their people more valuable will beat the leaders who make them optional.***

V · THE INVITATION

Three questions to keep

We are not asking you to sign anything. We are asking you to sit with three questions — and to notice which one refuses to leave.

The mirror question.

When your organization talks about AI, does it describe your people as a cost to be reduced — or a capability to be compounded? Listen to the language in your next leadership meeting. The strategy is hiding in the vocabulary.

The design question.

If AI could do half of every job in your company, what would you want the other half to become? Whoever answers that question — you, a vendor, or nobody — is designing your organization's future.

The legacy question.

Cost savings are forgotten within a quarter; what you did to people is retold for a career. One day your leadership will be summed up in a single sentence, in a room you are not in. Do you want that sentence to be "they automated faster than anyone" — or "working there made people more valuable than they had ever been"?

If one of these questions follows you home, pass this letter to the person who owns your AI agenda — and ask them the question that stayed. That conversation, multiplied across a few hundred leadership teams, is the future we are trying to start. And if you ever want to think it through out loud, our door in Copenhagen is open. It has been for twenty-five years.

The future of work is not something that happens to your organization.
It is something you design. Choose out loud.

Jesper Nytoft Bergmann

CEO & Executive Dean — on behalf of the faculty, members, and alumni of AVT Business School
Copenhagen, 2026 · The 25th anniversary year

The economic argument of this letter draws on Acemoglu, Autor & Johnson, "Building Pro-Worker Artificial Intelligence" (The Hamilton Project, Brookings, February 2026) — including the distinction between automating and new task-creating technologies, the evidence on new work since 1940, and the analysis of surveillance and expertise appropriation. The convictions, predictions, and commitments are AVT's own.