PORTFOLIO LEVERAGE
COMPANY ®

QUARTERLY INTELLIGENCE REPORT · Q2 2026

The AI Wage Gap

The premium hit 62% — even as the panic narrative softened.

62%

AI-SKILL WAGE PREMIUM · PwC GLOBAL AI JOBS BAROMETER, JUNE 2026

The headlines are calming down. The data is not. A fully-sourced field guide to the two-track labor market — and the operating system for ending up on the right side of it.

By **Yuri Kruman** — 3x CHRO/CLO · AI trainer for OpenAI, Meta & Microsoft
Founder, Portfolio Leverage Company · Author, *Closing the AI Wage Gap*
aiwagegap.com · portlev.com · Updated June 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Something broke in 2025. In 2026, the people who called it loudest began taking it back — and the data kept widening anyway.

The CEOs of Anthropic and OpenAI softened their "white-collar bloodbath" warnings. Klarna and Duolingo quietly re-hired humans they had replaced with AI. The mood, in short, recovered. The **structure** did not:

- PwC's June 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer put the AI-skill **wage premium at 62%** — up from 56% a year ago and 25% in 2024.
- **Recent-graduate unemployment (5.6%) rose above the national rate (4.3%)** for the first time on record — the bottom rung of the ladder, inverting.
- **87,714 US job cuts were attributed to AI in the first five months of 2026** — already more than all of 2025 combined.
- Only **5% of companies** capture AI value at scale; **95% of enterprise GenAI pilots** show no measurable P&L return.

The market stopped paying for the title and started paying for the **path**. By Q2 2026 there are two of them, and the distance between them compounds every quarter. This report maps both paths, the data underneath them, and the five-phase operating system for closing your personal — or your organization's — AI Wage Gap.

You don't read a report like this to stay informed. You read it to move.

Start with your number. The free **Beast Score** takes about 3 minutes and rates you on the five dimensions the market actually prices. You'll see your result on screen *and* get it by email — then book a free 30-minute AI Wage Gap Strategy call with Yuri to turn it into a plan.

Get your free Beast Score - about 3 minutes »

01 · THE INTELLIGENCE

Fifteen numbers that defined Q2 2026.

Synthesized from PwC, Lightcast, Stanford HAI, the WEF, McKinsey, BCG, Deloitte, MIT, Challenger and the NY Fed — then put through an adversarial verification pass. Every figure carries a named source. If a number lacks a source, it does not ship.

PWC 2026 BAROMETER

+62%

AI-skill wage premium, all industries (up from 56%)

PWC 2026 — TOP SECTOR

+118%

Consumer-markets premium; vs +16% in government

LIGHTCAST

+43%

Salary uplift for two or more AI skills (~$18K for one)

STANFORD HAI 2026

88%

Of orgs now use AI in ≥1 function (up from 78%)

WEF 2026

12%

Of execs expect AI to raise wages — 44.6% expect higher profits

PWC 2026

69% / 9%

AI-skilled roles grew ~8x faster than the whole market

STANFORD — CANARIES

-16%

Employment, ages 22–25 in AI-exposed jobs; devs ~ -20%

NY FED / BLS 2026

5.6%

Recent-grad unemployment — now above the 4.3% national rate

CHALLENGER 2026

87,714

AI-attributed US job cuts YTD — already > all of 2025

MIT NANDA 2025

95%

Of enterprise GenAI pilots show no measurable P&L; return

BCG 2025

5%

Of companies capture AI value at scale; 60% are laggards

MCKINSEY 2025

1%

Of leaders call their GenAI deployment "mature"

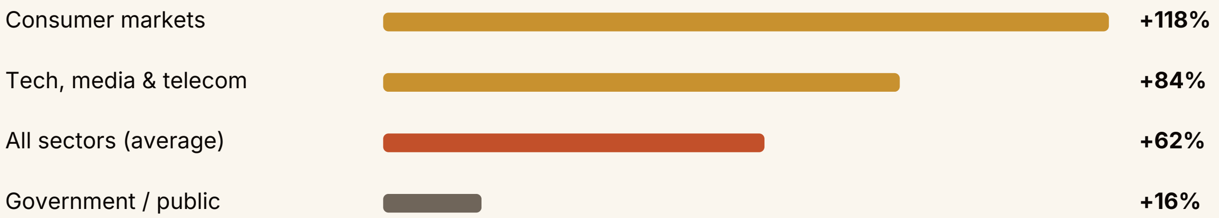
Removed this quarter after failing verification: a "14.2x output multiplier" attributed to McKinsey (no such figure exists) and "5M jobs facing extinction" attributed to Microsoft (journalistic framing, not a Microsoft finding). The discipline is the brand.

02 · DEEP DIVE

The premium has a shape — and it is getting sharper.

The 62% headline hides the real story: the premium is wildly uneven, and the unevenness is the signal. PwC's 2026 Barometer (over 1 billion job ads across 27 countries) shows the AI-skill wage premium ranging from **+118% in consumer markets** to **+16% in government**. The same skill is priced like a different profession depending on where it sits.

AI-skill wage premium by sector (PwC 2026)



PwC's framing for 2026 is **"two distinct paths."** "Professionalised" AI roles — where AI raises the ceiling on human judgment — grow roughly twice as fast in available jobs and show **+42% faster salary growth** than "democratised" roles where AI mostly substitutes the task. AI-skilled roles overall grew **69%** last year versus **9%** for the market. This is not a rising tide. It is a fork.

> *Same title, same company, same degree — radically different outcomes. One worker rebuilt the job around AI leverage; the other added AI tools to unchanged work. The market now pays them as if they belong to different professions.*
>
> THE ANATOMY OF THE GAP

03 · DEEP DIVE

The bottom rung is breaking — and it broke first for the young.

The clearest fingerprint of AI on the labor market is generational. Stanford's Digital Economy Lab ("Canaries in the Coal Mine," ADP payroll data) finds a **~16% relative employment decline for 22–25-year-olds** in the most AI-exposed occupations, while older, more experienced workers in the *same* jobs held steady or grew. Entry-level software developers are down nearly **20%** from their late-2022 peak.

The macro data now agrees with the micro. As of 2026, **recent-graduate unemployment (5.6%) sits above the national rate (4.3%)** — a reversal of the decades-long graduate advantage (NY Fed / BLS). And employer behavior confirms intent: Challenger, Gray & Christmas counted **87,714 AI-attributed US job cuts** in the first five months of 2026, already exceeding the whole of 2025; AI led every cited reason for cuts from March through May.

Signal	Q2 2026 reading	Source
Relative employment, 22–25 in exposed jobs	-16% (devs ~ -20%)	Stanford Digital Economy Lab
Recent-grad vs. national unemployment	5.6% vs 4.3% (inverted)	NY Fed / US BLS
AI-attributed job cuts, 2026 YTD	87,714 (> all of 2025)	Challenger, Gray & Christmas
Entry-level postings since Jan 2024	-29 points	LinkedIn Economic Graph

The ladder isn't being climbed more slowly. The bottom rung is being pulled up and thrown out. For mid-career leaders, the lesson is not "juniors are at risk" — it is that the tasks AI absorbs first are the ones your role was historically priced on. Wage compression precedes title compression, which precedes replacement.

04 · DEEP DIVE

The enterprise value gap is the mirror image of the wage gap.

At the company level, the same bifurcation runs between firms. **MIT's Project NANDA** found 95% of enterprise GenAI pilots deliver no measurable P&L return — the failure mode is organizational, a "learning gap," not a technology gap. **BCG** puts only **5% of companies** in the "future-built" tier capturing value at scale, with 60% laggards; the leaders report **2.7x the AI ROI, 1.7x the revenue growth, and 3.6x the shareholder returns** of the rest.

BCG — AI LEADERS

2.7x

The AI ROI of laggards (also 1.7x revenue growth)

BCG AI RADAR 2026

~2x

AI spend as a share of revenue is ~doubling (0.8% to 1.7%)

MCKINSEY

1%

Call deployment "mature" — the knowers-vs-doers gap

Capital is not the constraint — enablement is. AI spend is roughly doubling as a share of revenue (BCG AI Radar 2026, n~2,360 execs) and 94% of companies plan to keep investing even without near-term returns. Yet only 1% of leaders call their deployment mature (McKinsey). The gap between the knowers and the doers is exactly where the wage premium lives: the people who can actually operationalize AI inside a workflow are the scarce, repriced asset.

> *78% of the value isn't an adoption problem; it's a build problem. Enterprises retrofit chatbots onto unchanged workflows instead of rebuilding the work around how it actually runs. That is the AI Build Gap — the execution-side twin of the Wage Gap, and where PortLev operates.*
>
> THE ORGANIZATIONAL VIEW · aibuildgap.com

05 · THE HONEST READ

The narrative softened. Here's why the gap still widens.

A credible report has to hold the counter-evidence. In H1 2026 the loudest alarms quieted: Dario Amodei and Sam Altman **walked back** their starkest job-loss predictions; **Klarna** (which had replaced ~700 agents' worth of work with AI) and **Duolingo** publicly **re-hired humans** and softened their "AI-first" stances; and the NY Fed attributed much of the recent-grad unemployment rise to **remote work, not AI alone**.

All true — and none of it reverses the re-pricing. Walk-backs are about *tone and timeline*, not direction. The wage premium still rose to 62%. The grad inversion still happened. AI-attributed cuts still beat all of last year in five months. The reversals (Klarna, Duolingo) are a lesson about **bad sequencing** — firms that cut humans before rebuilding the work — not evidence that the leverage isn't real. The Multiplier's edge isn't "AI replaces people"; it's that AI-restructured work captures a premium that AI-sprinkled work never will.

Translation for the reader: do not let a calmer news cycle lull you. The quarter the narrative relaxed is the quarter the structural numbers hit new highs. That divergence — soft mood, hard data — is the single most important signal in this report.

Where is your AI Wage Gap widest — and what closes it fastest?

Find out in about 3 minutes. The free **Beast Score** maps your exposure across the five dimensions the market prices and returns your number on screen and by email — with a free 30-minute strategy call with Yuri one click away.

Get your free Beast Score - about 3 minutes »

06 · THE FRAMEWORK

Three archetypes. One is compounding. Two are not.

Archetype	Share	Profile	2030 trajectory
The Multiplier	~14%	Rebuilt the job around AI; ≥1 income stream beyond the W-2; owns IP/audience	Compounding +15–30%/yr
The Adaptor	~52%	Fluent with the tools, inside an unchanged job; largest, least stable group	Flat to +3%/yr real
The Avoider	~34%	Treats AI as a tool for "other people"; often the most senior title in the room	Flat to -10% real / 3 yrs

Identify yourself honestly — the archetype is remarkably predictive of five-year compensation. The good news: the only thing separating the Multiplier from the Adaptor is **how the work is structured**, not intelligence, hustle, or pedigree.

Score yourself in 60 seconds — the five dimensions the market prices

- **AI Fluency** — how fluently you work with frontier models in daily work.
- **Output Leverage** — your output-to-hours ratio versus peers.
- **Income Diversity** — streams beyond a single W-2.
- **Network Density** — the quality of your executive network.
- **Personal IP** — owned content, product, audience, reputation.

The free Beast Score self-assessment lives at aiwagegap.com. The full diagnostic — calibrated to your comp band, function, geography and horizon — runs inside a working session.

07 · BY FUNCTION

The premium is universal. Its shape is not.

Verified AI-skill demand growth, YoY (Lightcast)

Legal, Operations and Consulting are repricing too, but per-function growth figures beyond HR, Marketing and Finance are not publicly verifiable and are therefore not quoted here. Non-tech GenAI skill demand is up +800% since 2022.

08 · HOW WE GOT HERE

A three-year re-pricing of knowledge work.

When	What moved
Nov 2022	ChatGPT ships; non-tech AI-skill demand begins a +800% run.
2024	Premium hits 25% — PwC flags the first universal industry premium.
2025	Premium hits 56%; 70%+ of orgs on GenAI.
Q1 2026	Bifurcation becomes openly acknowledged.
Q2 2026	Two paths confirmed: premium 62%, grad-unemployment inversion, AI cuts top all of 2025.
2027 (proj.)	Re-pricing locks in; Multipliers compound, Avoiders hit forced restructurings.

09 · THE OPERATING SYSTEM

Five phases to close your AI Wage Gap.

Hope is not a strategy, and "AI for business" webinars are not a plan. What mid-career leaders need is an operating system — a loop from awareness to compounding leverage. This is the practitioner spine of *Career Beast Mode*.

Phase	What you do
1 · SEE	Map the real shape of the gap in your role, function and comp band. No more abstractions.
2 · MEASURE	Score yourself on the five dimensions the market scores you on (the Beast Score).
3 · DESIGN	Architect the income portfolio and AI-integration roadmap before you touch a new tool.
4 · EXECUTE	Launch the first AI-leveraged income stream while still employed. Protect your IP.
5 · SUSTAIN	Build the 10-year resilience layer: money OS, burnout firewall, identity beyond the role.

Each phase has concrete tools and a measurable output. The fastest results come from doing them in order — most people skip SEE and MEASURE and jump to buying tools, which is exactly why 95% of AI effort produces no return.

Turn this report into your number — in about 3 minutes.

Take the free **Beast Score**: see where you stand on the five dimensions that decide who captures the premium, get it emailed to you instantly, then book a free 30-minute AI Wage Gap Strategy call to turn it into a plan.

Get your free Beast Score - about 3 minutes »

10 · FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Your org's AI Wage Gap is a competitive risk — and a workforce problem.

The same divide that reprices individuals reprices companies. Organizations that align human-capital strategy with AI deployment pull away on every axis (BCG: 2.7x AI ROI, 1.7x revenue growth). Those that don't watch their AI spend evaporate into pilots, licenses and governance theater — and watch their best people quietly become Multipliers somewhere else.

How PortLev closes the organizational gap

- **AI readiness & workforce-gap assessment** — where your functions actually sit, and the highest-ROI moves.
- **Executive AI enablement** — programs that turn your top 50 leaders into Multipliers, not dabblers.
- **Custom AI systems** designed around how HR/talent and core workflows really run (the AI Build Gap).
- **Fractional CHRO** support for AI-driven workforce transformation.

About Portfolio Leverage Company

Portfolio Leverage Company (PortLev) is the firm behind this research — a Portfolio Engineering practice that helps mid-career executives and the enterprises that employ them close the AI Wage Gap through AI-leveraged career and organizational operating systems. Founded by Yuri Kruman (3x CHRO/CLO; AI trainer for OpenAI, Meta & Microsoft), PortLev runs executive AI enablement, fractional-CHRO engagements, and custom AI builds. Learn more or get in touch at portlev.com — the execution-side twin of this work lives at aibuildgap.com.

See where you — or your leadership bench — stand.

Start with the free **Beast Score** (about 3 minutes, on screen and emailed instantly), then book a free 30-minute call to scope an engagement. Prefer to reach out directly? Visit portlev.com or email yuri@portlev.com.

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AUTHOR

Yuri Kruman

Yuri Kruman is a 3x Chief Human Resources Officer and Chief Learning Officer, an AI trainer for OpenAI, Meta and Microsoft, and executive coach to 2,300+ leaders. He is the founder of Portfolio Leverage Company, a Top-5 Global HR Thought Leader (Thinkers360), and a seven-time author, including the forthcoming *Closing the AI Wage Gap*. He coined and defined the AI Wage Gap framework, the Multiplier/Adaptor/Avoider archetypes, the Beast Score, and Career Beast Mode. JD, Cardozo; BA, University of Pennsylvania.

METHODOLOGY & SOURCES

The data behind every number.

Synthesized from primary research and named surveys, then put through an adversarial verification pass. Every figure carries a named source; figures that could not be traced to a primary source were excluded. Updated quarterly.

- PwC — 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer — pwc.com/gx/en/issues/artificial-intelligence/job-barometer.html
- Lightcast — Beyond the Buzz — lightcast.io
- Stanford HAI — AI Index 2026 — hai.stanford.edu/ai-index/2026-ai-index-report/economy
- Stanford Digital Economy Lab — Canaries in the Coal Mine — digitaleconomy.stanford.edu
- WEF — Four Futures for Jobs 2026 — weforum.org
- McKinsey — State of AI 2025 / Superagency — mckinsey.com
- BCG — The Widening AI Value Gap 2025 / AI Radar 2026 — bcg.com
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- MIT — Project NANDA, State of AI in Business 2025; Challenger, Gray & Christmas; NY Fed / US BLS, 2026.